

# *Off the Pedestal; On the Stage*

## *Animation and De-animation in Art and Theatre*

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## *Abstract*

Whereas most genealogies of the puppet invariably conclude with robots and androids, this dissertation explores an alternative narrative. Here the inanimate object, first perceived either miraculously or idolatrously to come to life, is then observed as something that the live actor can aspire to, not necessarily the end-result of an ever evolving technological accomplishment. This research project examines a fundamental oscillation between the perception of inanimate images as coming alive, and the converse experience of human actors becoming inanimate images, whilst interrogating how this might articulate, substantiate or defy belief.

Chapters 1 and 2 consider the literary documentation of objects miraculously coming to life, informed by the theology of incarnation and resurrection in Early Christianity, Byzantium and the Middle Ages. This includes examinations of icons, relics, incorrupt cadavers, and articulated crucifixes. Their use in ritual gradually leads on to the birth of a Christian theatre, its use of inanimate figures intermingling with live actors, and the practice of tableaux vivants, live human figures emulating the stillness of a statue.

The remaining chapters focus on cultural phenomena that internalise the inanimate object's immobility or strange movement quality. Chapter 3 studies secular tableaux vivants from the late eighteenth century onwards. Chapter 4 explores puppets-automata, with particular emphasis on Kempelen's Chess-player and the physical relation between object-manipulator and manipulated-object. The main emphasis is a choreographic one, on the ways in which live movement can translate into inanimate hardness, and how this form of movement can then be appropriated. In chapter 5 I relate puppets and prostheses using texts such as Kleist's "On the Marionette Theatre", Pinocchio, Coppelia, Bergson on mechanical movement, and Jentsch on the Uncanny. In the context of theatrical practise, chapter 6 examines key texts and theories on puppet-like acting, concentrating primarily on Edward Gordon Craig's concept of the Uber-marionette.

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## *Introduction*

It begins sitting in a theatre.

One man stands still. His movements so slow they appear to halt into inanimation, freeze into the motionless image of himself. Hardly a breath of air. At a distance, two men walk around in a circumference, attached as it were to the central figure. He rotates at an infinitely slow pace, imperceptible. They quicken at the periphery of the stage, like cogs in a mechanism. He is moved through them, they through him. The centre is still, whilst the extremities accelerate.<sup>1</sup>

When a performer “de-animates” on stage, somehow transmits the impression of non-life, statue-like immobility, one has the impression that *agency is conveyed through rhythm*. It is as though one becomes aware of those puppeteers (or are they the puppets?) at the edge, the possibility that someone else's rhythm has overtaken, possessed, entered the body of the non-mover. If something or someone appears devoid of agency, the conjecture is that it has been displaced elsewhere. When an inanimate object, most familiar in its reliable inertia, resurrects into movement – be this a trickle of blood implying inner flow or a descent from the pedestal – an animating moving force is inferred within, without, or nearby. There is a *choreographic* principle underlying these assumptions.

This thesis aims to explore the notions of agency and presence (or lack of the same) *through* objects or persons. I look at how presence can be conveyed through certain modes of movement and choreography, and furthermore, how perceptions of agency can structure the beliefs of the viewer. Being predominantly dictated by a visual/performance practice, which sometimes anticipates and other times results from the written research, my method of analysis moves in and out of its objects of research, between spectator and embodiment. Indeed, this is the gradual trajectory that is traced, starting with the witnessing of miraculous objects (mostly in anthropomorphic form), and ending with the actual performance of this miraculous imagery. Throughout, bodies are constantly on the verge of becoming distant and enduring imitations of themselves, whilst objects appear to awaken to the possibility of bodily life.

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<sup>1</sup> From a workshop with Japanese Butoh company *Sankai Juku* held at Sadler's Wells, London, Autumn 1999.

Against the prevalent theories of spectatorship, particularly those used in art history and film studies which insist on visual perception as an objectifying process,<sup>2</sup> here I propose a model of *empathetic kinaesthetic perception*, which, drawing from the field of dance studies (and earlier still from the medieval mode of spectatorship based on *imitatio Christi*), combines vision, mimesis and empathy. It offers a form of looking that superimposes *being* a body and *seeing* a body, thus “bridging between subjectivities,”<sup>3</sup> between, we might add, animate subjects and inanimate objects (which accordingly upends the traditional dichotomy between subjects as animate and objects as inanimate). This position of the spectator is echoed in the duality of the objects of research, all of which can be said to exist at a tension between two poles, that of being object (thing) and that of being subject (person). The visual images tend to be what Robert Armstrong has, in another context, termed “*works of affecting presence*,”<sup>4</sup> and the performers emulating such images tend to play precisely on the effects of withdrawing presence, or enabling an external presence to appear through them.

The narrative traced here is one of a consistently mythological metamorphosis, a tale of the petrification, re-animation, and re-petrification of icons, relics, incorrupt cadavers, sculptural reliquaries, articulated crucifixes, ritual ‘dolls’ or ‘props’, tableaux vivants, early automata, anatomical models, puppets, prostheses, and armour, landing finally among forms of acting that emulate the puppet or inanimate object. Already in these ‘objects’ of research an outline emerges. One which touches upon fragmentation and reintegration; animation and de-animation, or acceleration and deceleration; movement, stillness and the translation of one to the other; mimetic transformation; the effect or control of one body upon another: efficacy, agency, belonging, autonomy, encapsulation, containment, possession, invasion, violation, scapegoating, manipulation, illusion, belief.

The witnessing of animation or de-animation determines a position of faith. Indeed, the dead-alive, inanimate-animate object-person makes or breaks a believer (and accordingly, a believer makes or breaks it). There is a fine line between making and breaking. Touch can become wounding, perhaps widening the gap of the lesion, opening up to various readings, expanding into a multiplicity of entries: the probing that enables belief, that substantiates (gives substance) to faith or understanding; the entrance that denies itself, denies ever having

<sup>2</sup> I examine these models of spectatorship with particular reference to tableaux vivants in chapter 3, 80, ff. 37.

<sup>3</sup> Deidre Sklar, “Five Premises for a Culturally Sensitive Approach to Dance,” *Moving History/Dancing Cultures: A Dance History Reader*, eds. A. Dils and A. C. Albright (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 30-32, 31-2.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Armstrong, *The Powers of Presence: Consciousness, Myth, and Affecting Presence* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).

<sup>5</sup> Susan Leigh Foster, “Choreographing History,” *Choreographing History* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 3-24, 7. For this very reason it is paramount to the present method of research to return to

touched, partaken; the intrusion that enables concealment, penetration to the point of disappearance, a *becoming* of the object that is pried into, getting under its skin, within it; mimicry and assimilation, entering the object by somehow letting it enter oneself, by way of being possessed by that object, turning it inside out, wearing it, shedding it.

This is a cross-disciplinary study, positioned between the pedestal and the stage, the visual arts and theatre/performance. I draw from visual and written records to analyse performing images in ritual and religious practices. Likewise, when studying the secular practices of performing images and acting techniques that transform the actor into sculptural object, I refer to evidence supplied by spectators, documentation referring to costumes and props, and where possible, photographic and video documents and reconstructions. Cinema, video and photography are referred to only inasmuch as they reproduce performances (although the layers are often hard to pry apart), but not as media in themselves, my concern being primarily three-dimensional, sculptural and corporeal.<sup>6</sup> New technologies of screen-based animated images and virtual reality indicate a growing interest in the area of the “moving image,” but this study aims to retrieve the sculptural in its three-dimensional weight-bearing presentation, to retrieve the corporeal moving image. Modernity is characterized by a two-way movement that renders the animate inanimate and viceversa (aesthetically, industrially, scientifically). To quote Mark C. Taylor, “From dioramas and panoramas to kinetoscopes and nickelodeons, images come to life and life passes into image.”<sup>7</sup> Provoked by these ever-accelerating developments, this dissertation is a necessary reconsideration of the physical moving image – the moving image which is less virtual, more tangible and sculptural/corporeal, in short, more *object*. Animation, animated objects, or actors emulating animated objects, are here viewed in a pre- or non-cinematic light, and are unearthed in earlier historical contexts (or later parallel yet circumventing contexts) that command a rethinking through such categories as performance, theatre, art history, sculpture, and costume.

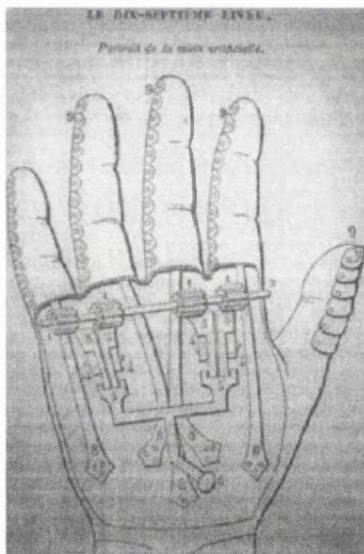
Indeed, the history extracted here is a constellatory history of props, puppets, and prosthesis, a history of specific objects and their invested use, the imaginary qualities they acquire and the things they become through performance. The *animators* are as central as the *animated*: the devotional objects, pseudo-scientific objects, objects of display or performance, and even the performers themselves, are unspeakable without their corresponding audiences, venerated, exhibitors, puppeteers, operators, wearers, or plain imitators. Agency and subjection are therefore always at issue. But whereas most discussions of agency centre on the post-industrial anxiety of being subsumed by the machine, in my examples there is never true *emancipation*:

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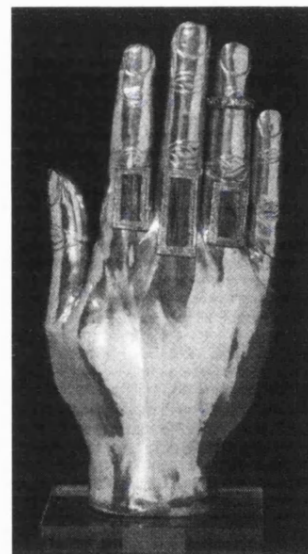
the space of the stage and evoke freshly shimmering bodies in the not so distant past, which manifestly or obliquely shed light on the more historical, and perhaps irretrievable, instances.

<sup>6</sup> For the relation of my own video work, see appendix A.

the puppet's strings are always somehow there, and remain the focus.<sup>8</sup> Christopher Asendorf provides an excellent reading of the post-industrial re-examination of the relation between the animate and the inanimate, writing: "objects become part of people – that is the path of mysticism... the people become part of the objects, and that is the path of alienation... in the conditions of industrialization – it can mean either the removal of boundaries or the loss of the self."<sup>9</sup> Likewise, Mark Seltzer refers to "the double logic of prosthesis:" *panic* as it projects a violent dismemberment of the natural body and emptying of human agency; *exhilaration* as it projects a transcendence of the natural body and extension of human agency through technology.<sup>10</sup> Such an 'either/or' notion of agency is unhelpful where, as here, one is positioned more precariously on the brink of performance (or at most 'technologies' of performance), between belief and willing suspension of disbelief. My aim is to evoke continuities between different historical configurations of the animate/inanimate: for example between a statuary relic which fleshes out and stands in for the body of the deceased, and prosthesis, also a stand-in for absence but animated by the remaining body.



1. Hand Prosthesis from the time of Ambroise Paré (1552).



2. Statuary Relic, Flemish, 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Unlike the Golem,<sup>11</sup> Frankenstein's monster or robots, who eventually turn against their makers and manipulators, the performing objects examined here do not truly attain

<sup>7</sup> Mark C. Taylor, *Hiding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 298.

<sup>8</sup> I differ from Petra Halkes' article "Phantom Strings and Airless Breaths: The Puppet in Modern and Post-modern Art," *Parachute* 92 (1998): 14-23, who writes of the modern incapacity to reattach the strings.

My alternating use of the terms 'puppet' and 'marionette' is often disregarding of the actual animating mechanism (i.e. strings, rods or glove puppets), except where specification is appropriate. My predominant focus is on the object's animation and its relation to an animator, more than to the animating device (although chapter 5 does partly touch upon mechanics).

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Asendorf, *The Batteries of Life: On the History of Things and their Perception in Modernity*, trans. Don Reneau, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1993), 38.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines* (London: Routledge, 1992), 157.

<sup>11</sup> I do not examine the Jewish tradition of the Golem or similar attempts to create an artificial anthropoid (Frankenstein's monster, etc.), primarily because, although it translated onto the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century stage as an

autonomous life; they remain puppets, perhaps as willingly so as the performers yearning for puppet-likeness. This is not to say that I focus on failed technology (although deceptive technology and technologies of illusion, yes), but that my interest lies in the *connection* and *convergence* between inanimate and animate, the ways in which the one affects, activates or becomes the other. I talk of invasion, but this invasion is never total. The possessor is never a perfect fit in the body of the possessed, *two* bodies remain always on the threshold of visibility, however subtle. I do not speak of slaves as much as of cohabitants. Manoeuvrability, reciprocity, exchangeability, but not obsolescence.<sup>12</sup> The focus is on *choreographic agency*, how one body moves (not removes) the other.

Likewise, the notion of the human body as machine comes into play only with the historical instances of the human staccato impersonation of machines, not the actual machine-hood of humans as workers, drones, or slaves. The man-machine paradigm surfaces briefly in chapters 4 and 6 (La Mettrie and Meyerhold), but ultimately robots and cyborgs are not, in this narrative, the pivot of what I term in chapter 6 the “inanimate incarnate.” Many scholars have viewed the puppet as the pre-technological robot, and automata somewhere in between the two.<sup>13</sup> I agree with this last proposition (automata-cum-puppets are discussed in chapter 4), but the puppet as performer is not to be equated with the robot as industrial slave.<sup>14</sup> A different dissertation might interestingly pursue the impersonation of machines, Karel Čapek’s 1921 play *R.U.R.*, Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* and so forth, centring on how humans mimic the physical effort of labour, how they embody technology and enact their own obsolescence without actually ever disappearing. However, this thesis is less concerned with labour and economies of motion, than with the aesthetics of the performing object-body.

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instance of ‘performing the inanimate,’ it is akin to the realm of alchemy, and, like the contemporaneous myth of Faustus, ultimately centres on the dangers and eventual revenge of the God-defying creation. The Golem has been claimed as the precursor to modern cybernetics, which, again, would deviate from the main focus by aligning this dissertation with the predominant genealogy of puppets leading into industrial robots. Cf. Moshe Idel, *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1990); Emily D. Bilski, *Golem! Danger, Deliverance, Art* (New York: The Jewish Museum, 1988).

<sup>12</sup> Hence the irrelevance of a contemporary performer like Stelarc, with his euphoric technophilic claims of the obsolescence of man, which he articulates only through his own presence and precise non-invisibility.

<sup>13</sup> And before the puppet, the golem or homunculus. The list is endless, but perhaps the most prominent example in the field of theatre studies is Harold B. Segel’s *Pinocchio’s Progeny: Puppets, Marionettes, Automats and Robots in Modernist and Avant-Garde Drama* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), and in the visual arts, Halkes concludes her article with the cyberpuppet of Donna Haraway. An interesting reverse trajectory is evoked in Gaby Wood’s recent *Living Dolls: A Magical History of the Quest for Mechanical Life* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), which starts with mechanical dolls and ends “organically” with the midgets of the performing Doll family.

<sup>14</sup> As Jane Goodall points out, “it is no coincidence that the rise of the robot fantasy follows the demise of colonial slavery: the anthropomorphic machine promises an untroubled dream of power by offering the prospect of guilt-free slavery.” “Transferred Agencies: Performance and the Fear of Automatism,” *Theatre Journal* 49 (1997): 441-53, 446. Cf. also Norman Bryson’s “Cultural Studies and Dance History,” *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*, ed. J.C. Desmond (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 55-77, 74.

*Metropolis* brings me to another tendency in the study of animator and animated: the gendered form of pygmalionism whereby man is maker, animator, and woman is made, manipulated.<sup>15</sup> Although sometimes this proves true, I would not go so far as to assert it as a rule. The lure (or horror) of the inanimate is often precisely its sexlessness, its non-reproductive sterility, its de-psychologised essence. If, as Marjorie Garber has shown, "Transvestite theatre is the Symbolic on the stage... [it] recognizes that *all* of the figures on stage are impersonators,"<sup>16</sup> the performing object, far more so than the transvestite performer, is the space of projection par excellence. As I show in chapter 2, transubstantiated *becoming* is paramount to the inanimate on stage. That it just so happens that often this is drawn from the diminutive 'lower' hierarchies ('popular' culture, oriental 'others,' the 'weaker' sex),<sup>17</sup> more than stabilising the nature and sex of the inanimate animated, points to its non-stagnant versatility. A puppet, an automaton, a prosthesis, a statuary relic, although perhaps dressed in outer layers of sexualised costume, or partaking in the sexuality of their animators, ultimately remain porous as a penetrable site of projection, and therefore genderless (or pure transcended sexuality...)<sup>18</sup>

This thesis contributes to an historical understanding of the terms *image*, *real*, *miracle*, *belief*, in European context, but is by no means a comprehensive account of their semantic transformations even throughout European history. However, it is true to say that their meanings in early Christianity serve the remaining historical instances, even when Christian theology or practice is no longer a central issue. Thus the term *image* (derived from the Latin *imago*), as "imitation, copy, likeness, statue, picture... An artificial imitation or representation of any object, especially a person,"<sup>19</sup> comes to encompass not only the material objects of art

<sup>15</sup> See for example Claude Quiguer, *Femmes et Machines de 1900* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1979); Annette Michelson, "On the Eve of the Future: The Reasonable Facsimile and the Philosophical Toy," *October* 29 (1984), 3-20; Mary Ann Doane, "Technophilia: Technology, Representation, and the Feminine," *Body/Politics: Women and the Discourse of Science*, eds. M. Jacobs et al. (London: Routledge, 1990), 163-176; Andreas Huyssen, "The Vamp and the Machine: Technology and Sexuality in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*," *New German Critique* 24-25 (1981-2): 221-37, who hypothesises the shift from benign man-machine to threatening vampire as one which associates sexualised woman and machine; Mladen Dolar, "La Femme-Machine," *New Formations* 23 (1994): 43-54.

<sup>16</sup> Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992), 40.

<sup>17</sup> Although the puppet may elude sexualisation, it is nonetheless clearly (but not unambiguously) a symbol of cultural subordination, as Scott Cutler Shershow has shown at length. The inanimate figure has served as a diminutive emblem used by its detractors to debase the child-like, the popular, the feminine, the naïve, the ignorant, the idolatrous, even while it has been appropriated and incorporated into 'high' art. *Puppets and "Popular" Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

<sup>18</sup> Surrealism's highly eroticised mannequins are not included in this discussion, primarily because they do not perform as moving animated objects, but also because they propose themselves as anagrams of the unconscious and have been taken up by predominant research from a psychoanalytic perspective. See for example Hal Foster who discusses the surrealist's obsession with automata in his *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: An October Book, MIT Press, 1993); Sue Taylor, *Hans Bellmer: The Anatomy of Anxiety* (Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2000).

<sup>19</sup> According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 2001 (henceforth abbreviated as OED). The word came into English usage around the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, particularly with Early Christian references to "graven" images or the solid statue-like effigy of human likeness (used for example by the iconophobe Wyclif, cf. chapter 2). The application of the term to a person "as compared in some respect to a statue or idol" comes into the English language in the mid-sixteenth century (for example in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* II, I, 9 "The one is too like an image and says nothing."), and coincides with the late medieval practice of tableaux vivants (cf. chapter 3).

history (or those objects pertaining to what Belting terms the “era of the image”<sup>20</sup>) but also the imitation of an object by a person, consolidating that person into an image. The term suggests a two-way mimesis: the traditional image-imitating-person, and its less acknowledged counterpart, person-imitating-image. As a starting point, I find it useful to look to the theology of images articulated through Byzantium in order to source the possibility of an image participating in its prototype, in other words, the imitation partaking in the nature of that which it imitates. Such a relational definition empowers the image as a conveyer of agency and presence. Likewise, the term *real* does not, in this dissertation, reflect on Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, philosophical speculation, or scientific empiricism. Once again, it is through a historical moment in Christianity that the term becomes relevant to this study: the Medieval articulation of the notion of *Real Presence* in the doctrine of the Transubstantiation, the substantial presence of Christ’s body and blood in the Eucharist. Derived from the Latin word for ‘thing’ (*res*), here too, *real* is an effective term when it comes to encompass the possibility of substantial (as opposed to symbolic, analogical, etc.) presence through the image, the object or thing. Bedos-Rezak writes of this Medieval theological/perceptual shift: “Images were promoted to quasi-personal beings. The language of analogy seeped into the language of ontology: ‘to be like’ became ‘to be part of.’”<sup>21</sup> The relation between ‘real’ object and its image becomes one of participation and embodiment, not merely imitation. In almost all of the examples cited in the dissertation, this participatory relation is at stake, whether in its confirmation or in its denial (such as the post-Reformation reassessment of the image, or the theatrical theories and performances which attempt to mask the actor’s realness by acting out non-participation or absence). Chapter 1 serves to elucidate these notions, postulating through early Christianity an equivalence between bodies and images, relics and icons, incorrupt cadavers and statues. Chapter 2 serves as a prologue to the remaining chapters, in that it examines early Medieval theatrical practice from such an angle as to open out to tableaux vivants (chapter 3) and automata (chapter 4), setting the tone for the more secular instances of performance. It serves as bridge between Christian religious belief and theatrical belief. In discussing the Reformation, chapter 2 also touches upon the historical catalyst which served the move away from transubstantiation,<sup>22</sup> the flattening out of the miraculous relational image into a new configuration of human agency and presence inside or adjoining the image (second skin, puppet, prosthesis).

Inevitably, the terms *miracle* and *belief* shift throughout these historical transitions. It is difficult to define these terms specifically in their relation to images, as they constantly elude

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<sup>20</sup> Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. E. Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>21</sup> Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak, “Medieval Identity: A Sign and a Concept,” *American Historical Review* 105, 5 (2000): 1489-1533, 1503.



canonical religion, as well as canonical definition, seeping into the everyday of popular culture. The reason images were so often the subject of heated theological and political debate is precisely because they were unmanageable, un-institutional, unsanctioned channels for divine presence, which manifested themselves to the poor, the illiterate, the uneducated, the “gullible.” If a miracle (from the Latin *mirari*, ‘to wonder’) is defined as a marvellous event occurring within human experience, “which cannot have been brought about by human power or by the operation of any natural agency, and must therefore be ascribed to the special intervention of the Deity or of some supernatural being,”<sup>23</sup> it is clear that this predication rests on the ascription of agency. Depending on the nature of the agent, which in turn depends on the witness’ system of knowledge and set of beliefs, a marvellous event is either a miracle or an ingenious hoax.<sup>24</sup> From at least as far back as Thomas of Aquinas, a miracle is defined as a violation of the laws of nature. According to Aquinas, a miracle “arises when an effect is manifest, whereas its cause is hidden... and this cause is God.”<sup>25</sup> Throughout the Middle Ages miracles with “hidden” causes were a regular part of everyday life, institutionally authorized or nullified, but nonetheless possible.<sup>26</sup> Protestantism, however, decreed such events popish “frauds,” and set out to expose their trickery. Reginal Scot’s 1584 book *Discovery of Witchcraft*, highly influential both in England and in the continent, discredited modern miracles, uncovering them as witchcraft, prestidigitation or superstition, and book VIII claims that miracles, alongside the gift of prophesy and oracles, “are ceased.”<sup>27</sup> Against the interventionist hierarchical structures of Catholicism, the Reformation sought to restrict miracles to biblical times, and eventually heralded the spirit of rationalism, which would redefine miracles as magical beliefs and folk superstition. In 1865, the Irish historian W.E.H. Lecky writes: “There is no change in the history of the last 300 years more striking, or more suggestive of more curious enquiries than that which has taken place in the estimate of the miraculous.”<sup>28</sup> Keith Thomas continues this view in his book *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971), describing how

<sup>22</sup> Indeed David Hume (ff. 26 below) opens his section “On Miracles” with an argument against *real presence*, arguing for empirical non-transubstantiation which should undo superstition.

<sup>23</sup> OED. First appears in the English language in the early twelfth century (for example, Chaucer) and particularly common during the fourteenth century, when, as we shall see, miracles abounded. In its weakened sense, as a merely “surprising or unexpected phenomenon or event,” it is used from Shakespeare onward and is particularly common in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

<sup>24</sup> Unlike Joe Nickell’s *Looking for a Miracle: Weeping Icons, Relics, Stigmata, Vision and Healing Cures* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1993), this dissertation does not set out to demystify (nor verify) the validity of miraculous images, but rather to examine the survival of miraculous performances of objects in theatre. I aim to look at the effects of spectatorship without belittling or applauding the spectators.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas of Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: R. & T. Washbourne, 1911-22), part 1, question 105, article 7, 405. Interestingly, Aquinas brings in the question of knowledge and ignorance in the perception of a miracle, writing “Now the cause of a manifest effect may be known to one, but unknown to others...” Cf. below, ff. 27.

<sup>26</sup> For a subtle reading of the notion of the miraculous in the Middle Ages, see Caroline Walker Bynum, “Wonder,” *American Historical Review* (1997): 1-26, where she points out that, contrary to the prevalent assumption, knowledge and wonder were not mutually exclusive in most medieval religious discourse.

<sup>27</sup> Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (New York: Dover, 1972), 89-92.

<sup>28</sup> William Edward Hartpole Lecky, *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe*, 2 vols. (London: Longman, 1865), vol. 1, 1 (which draws upon his earlier book, *The Declining Sense of the Miraculous*); see also David Brewster, *Letters on Natural Magic* (London: John Murray, 1834).

religious and supernatural modes of explanation were “surmounted” in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Throughout the eighteenth century, in an attempt to adjust religion to reason, Christian belief began to rely less on the evidence of miracles, and more on faith alone.<sup>29</sup> Philosophy would define a miracle as the term for the unknown, hence implying the ignorance of the witness – also coinciding with the gradual shift in the use of the term belief from translating the Latin *fides*, ‘faith,’ to signifying an intellectual process.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, throughout the thesis I look at a variety of performing objects which predictably nuance the meanings of the terms according to the applied system of knowledge and the ascription of agency. Some underwent a transformation from hoax to miracle or vice versa during their very lifetime (the statue of St. Foy in chapter 1, and the Rood of Kent in chapter 2).

The different configurations of agency through objects determine the beliefs of the spectators, and the present narrative traces the endurance, transformation or obsolescence of belief structures in relation to performing objects. The surge in writings on animated images, such as David Freedberg’s *The Power of Images* (1989); Kenneth Gross’ *The Dream of the Moving Statue* (1992), earlier still Theodore Ziolkowski’s *Disenchanted Images* (1977) or most recently Victoria Nelson’s *The Secret Life of Puppets* (2002), all imply a sense of secularised disenchantment whilst firmly asserting (indeed uncovering, as it were, from our post-Reformation “repressed” memory<sup>31</sup>) the persistence of the belief in miraculously animated images. Some of the above authors identify a simple relocation of such beliefs within the fantasies of literature or cinema, more often than not under the guise of malign vengeance, as though the miraculous image were imprecating “believe in me or die!” Where my work differs is in its emphasis on theatre as a space in which to challenge the irresolution of belief.

Throughout the first half of the dissertation we encounter three main instances of conversion to either belief or disbelief in the inanimate reanimated: the first is the emergence and institutionalisation of Christianity, which posits creedal belief in the resurrection of the dead and by extension of their relics and images; the second is the crisis of iconoclasm in eighth-century Byzantium, creating a divide between iconophobic and iconophilic Christians, with

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<sup>29</sup> The “sola fides” emphasis had begun earlier in the sixteenth century with Luther. There were, of course, exceptions to this rule, and throughout the eighteenth century Pietist Protestantism and some Huguenot strains began to seek out the miraculous as evidenced in powers of prophecy.

<sup>30</sup> Pantheists such as Benedict de Spinoza and Deists such as David Hume rejected miracles, which they associated with the ignorance of the masses concerning the cause of an effect. For a useful study of Hume and a collection of the relevant texts on miracles including Spinoza (1670), Locke (1706), Hume (1777), etc., see John Earman, *Hume’s Abject Failure: The Argument Against Miracles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>31</sup> This follows from Freud’s notion of the uncanny as the return of repressed beliefs, and is discussed in chapter 6 through his predecessor, Jentsch. Even so, the primary concern here is not with the psychological, which might concentrate on the fretting anxiety of the disbelievers, but rather with the potentially de-psychologized model offered by the inanimate object.

Terry Castle and Victoria Nelson view post-Reformation Enlightenment as the historical catalyst which forced obsolete “superstitious” beliefs to take refuge in literature and other forms of popular culture. Cf. chapter 5, 136, ff. 35.

the triumph of the latter (still prevalent in Orthodox Christianity); and the third is the European iconoclasm of the Reformation during the sixteenth century, leaving as its successor the disbelieving 'enlightened' rationalism prevalent among the rising middle-classes. This gradual process of secularisation and growing disbelief in miraculous images is accompanied by an increasing visual and theatrical realism.

There can be no monocausal explanation for the shifts in belief, the obsolescence of one form of 'performing images' and its replacement with another. Undoubtedly, a combination of historical, socio-political, theological, philosophical and technological developments coincide, *a priori*, *a posteriori* or simultaneously, with the more specific shifts in performing images I touch upon. Some of these are brought into dialogue with the examples, others would involve too complex a contextualization and would distract from the main argument. I do not pretend to offer a linear historical narrative, though the chapters are bound together by survivals and anticipations. There are clearly moments in which the performing object or performing the object became a particularly prominent cultural strategy: early medieval piety and theatrical practice; late eighteenth - early nineteenth-century performances of automata; nineteenth and twentieth-century performances of tableaux vivants; early twentieth-century puppet-like acting. Between these I make historical leaps forward, backward and across, and though there are gaps, there are also some revealing juxtapositions. I do not attempt to give a complete or causal history of this mimetic empathetic gaze toward the sculptural object, but to evoke key constellations.

In chapter 1, I look at the biblical notion of image-hood as non-relational dead object, and early Christianity's progressive articulation of a hypostatic image, which participates in the nature of what it represents. The devotional importance of icons in Byzantium and relics in the West is viewed in light of Christianity's reassessment of the visual and material world, addressed through debates concerning Christ's incarnation. This culminates in the West in the thirteenth century with the doctrine of the transubstantiation and the rise of incarnational aesthetics, by which images are increasingly more body-like whilst bodies emulate images. The concern with the *corpo-real*, as I term it, leads into chapter 2, where I examine the birth of European Christian theatre and the implications of the body on stage, the prop as surrogate body, and the convergence of animate and inanimate in stagecraft (in the simulation of both life and death or dying). I conclude with the iconoclasm of the reformation and its modes of performing a demystification of the animated image, dissecting the object's materiality and proving its inanimate deadness, its non-transubstantiation from representational object into real object. The relational image is reconfigured according to new strategies of participation with an animating force. With this move from ritual into theatre, from the sacred to the secular (or

indeed the secularised), the production and periodic resurrection of belief becomes an important parallel to the production and reproduction of life.

From here onwards I examine various modes of performance which emulate the inanimate object coming to life, or the live actor simulating the inanimate object. Chapter 3 studies the development of the tradition of *tableaux vivants* throughout the eighteenth-nineteenth century, prefiguring photography and sequential still images, although the focus is on the performing body as sculptural object (rather than the photographic or cinematic object that might result from such performance). Paradoxically, it is with this freezing into stillness and withdrawal of presence that the question of *choreographic agency* appears most explicit, and is later picked up in the following chapters. Chapter 4 looks at early automata and the ways in which the choreographies of the performing object and its exhibitor are manipulated for the persuasive effects of mechanical (non-miraculous) animation. Taking its cue from Kleist's essay *On the Marionette Theatre*, chapter 5 examines the aesthetic implications of a body which merges with a prosthetic limb, or which simulates the puppet-like choreography of the object's animation. Chapter 6 looks at the early twentieth-century's fascination with the puppet-like actor, which, beyond choreographic concerns, also brings in actorial techniques of absence and depersonalisation, as well as dilemmas of control and subjection. Starting with Gordon Craig's idea of the *über-marionette*, I conclude with Oskar Schlemmer's body costumes and ways in which this second-skin might dictate choreographic agency and perhaps resolve some questions of the relationship of puppet and puppeteer.

Time and again, it would appear that the more lifelike the image, the more effective it becomes in portraying death. Thus, the closer to achieving animated lifelikeness, epitomised for example in the anthropomorphic automata of the eighteenth century, the more the miraculous object must reveal its non-miraculous life, in other words, its technology. When such imagery transposes to the realm of performance, the overt life-likeness of the actor equally attempts to undo his/her own realism by reverting to the inanimatedness of the image. At the turn of last century, Arthur Symonds was perhaps the first observer to identify the triple movement of mimicry that characterised his age, writing of the live performer's imitation of an imitation of him or herself (cf. chapters 3 and 6). I would hesitate to portray this tendency merely as the effect of a secularised search for the "miraculous."<sup>32</sup> Instead, my attempt is to read these instances as forms of mimesis more akin to *embodiment*, a kinaesthetic empathy. In performing the inanimate incarnate stripped bare of any trickery or technology of deception, in showing very plainly the double vision of the dead-alive image, the miraculous image comes

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<sup>32</sup> Norman Bryson has interestingly suggested to me that this re-enactment be somewhat 'homeopathic,' as though to soothe the wooden thud of secularisation.

full circle: here Coleridge's expression of theatrical "*willing suspension* of disbelief"<sup>33</sup> is perhaps at its most literal. On the stage, marionettes are indeed genuine figurative illustrations of the "suspension" of the disbelieved object, re-believed. The question remains, does willing suspension of disbelief amount to newfound redemptive belief?



3. Francisco de Goya, *The Puppet*, late 18<sup>th</sup> century.



Lastly, a few words on voice and ventriloquism. The text of the thesis tends to shift between various rhetorical modes. From the more historical frameworks, the chapters often flash-forward to a contemporary instance, which might punctuate or offset a previous section or anticipate a new one. These are crucial interventions during which the writer's position as spectator is brought to the fore. Essentially, as stated in the opening of this introduction, *it begins sitting in a theatre*. Whether examining remote historical documentation or more contemporary performances, I am myself engaged in a constant interplay and negotiation between spectator, reader, transcriber and performer. Movement or non-movement, that of animated miraculous objects, or that of a performer long dead, is here resurrected and retrieved by the imagination, transcribed and coagulated into words. My writing body, from its immobility at the desk, responds proprioceptively with a kind of kinaesthetic mimicry to these

<sup>33</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 1817, vol. 2 (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 6.

narratives. As Susan Leigh Foster elegantly writes of the task of the dance-historian (equally applicable to the task of the art-historian describing 'performing' images):

...dead bodies... create a stir out of the assimilated and projected images from which they are concocted, a kind of stirring that connects past and present bodies. This affiliation, based on a kind of kinaesthetic empathy between living and dead but imagined bodies, enjoys no primal status outside the world of writing... Once the historian's body recognizes value and meaning in kinaesthesia, it cannot dis-animate the physical action of past bodies it has begun to sense... the writing body listens and waits as fragments of past bodies shimmer and then vanish.<sup>34</sup>

For this very reason it is paramount to the present method of research to return frequently to the space of the stage and evoke freshly shimmering bodies in the not so distant past, which manifestly or obliquely shed light on the more historical, irretrievable as it were, instances referred to. And similarly, my own position as an artist attempts to draw from and feed back into this kinaesthetic process, to absorb and enact in the flesh (cf. appendix 2). The voices which run throughout the text, some of which speak of, speak for, speak through and are spoken through, often find a body in me.




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<sup>34</sup> Susan Leigh Foster, 'Choreographing History,' *Choreographing History* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 3-24, 7.

## I

*Icons, Relics, Incorrupt Cadavers**Participating Images, Real Presence, Incarnational Aesthetics*

In the history of Christianity a distinctive phenomenon both incensed and inspired adherents and converts: the attribution of life to the inanimate. Images and relics alike were to become among the most vital organs of Christian devotional practice, though from the start they inevitably provoked discussion regarding the life or presence thought to reside or express itself through these objects. From the moments of the Incarnation (in which Christ had become tangible flesh) and the Resurrection (his return to life after death), the material visible world, and even more so the realm of the inert dead, were thought to possess much more vitality than meets the naked eye. Resurrection and animation became parallel, if not almost identical miraculous features undoing the stillness of the inanimate. In this chapter, the Eastern Church's crisis of iconoclasm and the Western Church's decree of the doctrine of the transubstantiation articulate a Christian image-theory based on participation and the possibility of agency. Instances of human bodies becoming 'image' either by dying into relic-hood or incorruption or by enacting the piety of *imitatio Christi*, set the stage for medieval theatre.

The Judeo-Christian biblical prohibition on visual representation delivers its most articulate expression in the second commandment, which forbade the making and worshipping of any graven images or 'likenesses.'<sup>1</sup> The idolatry of the surrounding cultures, and occasionally of the disobedient people of Israel, is described in the bible not so much as something wicked but as a laughable and pitiable weakness. Beyond the obvious unlikeness to that which they were meant to represent (not to mention their artisan derivation), inanimate sculptures were ridiculed as lifeless and therefore powerless. In fact, it was precisely their inanimate nature, their insentient deadness and opacity, which was most scorned. In line with many of the so-called books of the apocrypha, *Wisdom* 13:17-19 describes an idolater as follows:

He is not ashamed to speak to that which hath no life: Yea for health he calleth upon that which is weak, And for life he beseecheth that which is dead, And for aid he supplicateth that

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<sup>1</sup> *Exodus* 20:3. All subsequent biblical quotes are from the *Revised Standard Edition*, as this study focuses on Christian precedents of the miraculous or performing object, and the ways in which Christian theology leads to an incarnational *aesthetics*. Therefore, it does not take into account the Jewish position on images, although making reference to the "Old Testament (or *Tanach*). Cf. page 8, ff. 11.

which has least experience, and for a good journey that which cannot so much as move a step,  
And for gaining and getting and good success of his hands He asketh ability of that which with  
its hands is most unable.

The passage sets up a series of oppositions contrasting life with death, speech with speechlessness, mobility with immobility. There can be no participation or reciprocation between the two. The futility and ineffectiveness of that which is dead (in this case, idols) is further emphasised in *Psalm* 135:15-16: "They have mouths but they speak not; they have eyes, but they see not; they have ears, but they hear not; nor is there any breath in their mouths." The idol, although in its contours similar to the living, is obtuse; it cannot take in and cannot emit, it has no animated inside, it is profoundly insentient. Its blunt silence is in profound contrast to the reverberation of God's voice. It has no possible agent, no presence within. In *Jeremiah* 10:3-6 the idol's subjection to human manipulation, its 'puppetry,' as it were, is ridiculed:

A tree from the forest is cut down, and worked with an axe by the hands of a craftsman. Men deck it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so that it cannot move. Their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field, and they cannot speak; They have to be carried, for they cannot walk.<sup>2</sup>

The idol's transformation from wood to craftwork is one that is constantly reiterated in such accusations, as if to emphasize its metamorphic nature – it was once something else, just as it is easily destabilized from "tree" to "fuel" to "fire" and the leftover is made into idol (*Isaiah* 44:12-16); or from "rings of gold" to "molten calf" to "powder" eaten in punishment by the idolatrous people of Israel (*Exodus* 32:1-20). It is essentially passive, constantly done to rather than doing, docile under the hand of man. Fascinatingly, in the above passage, its potential mobility is hinted at ever so subtly with the mention of a nail and hammer that fasten it into imagehood. It cannot move, although were it not quasi-'crucified,' it just might.

Descriptions of lifeless images easily slip into the rhetoric of descriptions of lifeless bodies, as if to imply an equivalence. The death of the body enables the understanding of the dead image. In the words of Maurice Blanchot, "At first sight the image does not resemble a cadaver, but it could be that the strangeness of a cadaver is also the strangeness of the image."<sup>3</sup> This similarity

<sup>2</sup> In the *New International Version* "move" is translated as "totter." In Hebrew the word יָפִיק *yafik*, comes from the verb פִּיק *pik*, meaning to totter or tremble). Similarly, in the extra-canonical *Baruch-Letter of Jeremiah* 6:26-27, it is said of idols: "Having no feet, they are carried on men's shoulders, revealing to mankind their worthlessness. And those who serve them are ashamed because through them these gods are made to stand, lest they fall on the ground. If any one sets one of them upright, it cannot move of itself; and if it is tipped over, it cannot straighten itself; but gifts are placed before them just as before the dead."

<sup>3</sup> Maurice Blanchot, "Two Versions of the Imaginary," *The Gaze of Orpheus and Other Literary Essays*, ed. A. Sitney, trans. G. Hartman, (New York: Station Hill Press, 1981), 79-89, 81.



denotes the image as the remnant of presence. The origin of idolatry according to *Wisdom* 14:15-20 was precisely a bereaved father mourning the death of his child, the substitution of absence for presence, an image that functions almost like a dead (and surviving) body where there no longer is one. The custom is then transferred to the worship of monarchs, for flattery is passed to "the absent one as though present" through the image. According to the text:

Some father, overwhelmed with untimely grief for the child suddenly taken away from him, made an image of his child and honoured thenceforth as a god what was once a human being, handing on to his household the observance of rites and ceremonies. Then this impious custom, established by the passage of time, was observed as law.

This testamental Jewish argument, employed here as accusatory, would eventually become the basis for a Christian theory of image participation.

If the idol-image could not (at this stage) retain presence, dead bodies certainly could. Just as death in Christianity was reversible (or rather provisional, until the second coming), dying, especially as a martyr, was becoming a god-given gift. Early Jewish-Christians were exhorted to meet death with calm and confidence, as Christ and the martyrs had done (*John* 18:11). Mourning had little place in this state of slumber from which the deceased would eventually awaken (1 *Thessalonians* 4:13-14). The integrity of resurrection was understood to defy all loss, dissolution and dispersion, and is well demonstrated by the analogy of the regurgitation of Jonah, later to become as central an argument in resurrection treatises as Ezekiel in the valley of dry bones. The concept of an indissoluble unity beyond all fragmentation was to become of great significance in Christian theology and accordingly in Christian devotion. The power of the martyrs rose from their proximity to God as well as from the manner of their death (*Acts* 7:55-56; *Revelation* 7:14-15); by way of extension, their bones and possessions acquired the same benevolent emanation (*Matthew* 9:20; *Acts* 5:15; 19:12; cf. 2 *Kings* 13:21). Throughout their protracted and torturous shattering they apparently did not suffer, but maintained a pure state of indivisibility, enjoying a kind of analgesic anaesthesia until their final sleep.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, one of the distinctive characteristics of Christianity from the fourth century onwards became the salvage, and often savage dismembering, of the remains of the cadavers of saints, which were then worshipped and treasured as though alive, whole and indivisible. Jews, Pagans and even some members of the early Christian community were appalled, and often those holy figures known as saints themselves made clear their wish for an undisturbed burial.

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<sup>4</sup> Setting an example for future martyrs, Stephen, the first Christian martyr, enjoyed a vision of god and Christ whilst being stoned to death, and after his final words ("Jesus, receive my spirit"): he placidly "fell asleep" (*Acts* 7:59-60).

Such oscillation between an up-front physical contact with the dead and a more Judaic notion of impurity is epitomised in the events following Jesus' resurrection. Christ's imperative "noli me tangere," addressed to Maria Magdalene (*John* 20:17), stands out against his bodily proffering to Thomas. Thomas' challenge that unless he place his "finger in the mark of the nails," is contested by Christ eight days later by offering himself, saying "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing." (*John* 20:24-29). Ultimately, this latter example of a tangible, visible basis to faith, in particular the belief in the sainthood of the special dead and their objects, would prevail and fashion the territorial map of the ever-expanding religion. Christian relics were to be increasingly 'invented,' translated, consecrated, and venerated in their new holy abode. This permeability of the dead body, its passive submission to the living, was essential to the rise in relic veneration. As Sarah Beckwith writes, the body of Christ is "both closed and open through its wounds,"<sup>5</sup> and these wounded/wounding entrances and exits, the body's penetrability and surrender to human touch, were to become the most sacred and defiled aspects of later Medieval devotion to the Cross and to the Passion.

Nonetheless, the belief in something dead coming to life or being alive was, in many cases, deemed highly offensive, especially when linked to a putative participation in the nature of divinity. In the second century, Clement of Alexandria condemns the worshippers of dead idols to become that which they worship, in other words, inanimate. He draws a comparison between Niobe and Lot's wife (*Genesis* 19:26), two unfortunate wretches noteworthy for having been metamorphosed: Tantalus' daughter on Sipylon to stone, and the Sodomite woman at the end of the Dead Sea into a pillar of salt (whom Clement instead turns to stone). Both women, writes Clement, were transformed into a state of insensibility (*anaesthesia*), which is the inevitable condition of those impious and hardhearted persons who worship dead and stony statues.<sup>6</sup> He who worships non-presence becomes himself non-present. The theory echoes the second half of the previously quoted Psalm: "Like them be those who make them! – yea, every one who trusts in them!" (*Psalms* 135:13-18; cf. 115:8). All this is in striking contrast to what would come to characterize the Christian associations of relics and icons from the fifth century onwards. In many ways, their miraculous effects continued the wonders enacted by Jesus, in other words, the power to give life, to heal from incapacitating illnesses and to emanate protection. Their apparent stillness hardly represented an obstacle, and in no way was their deadness thought of as contagious. Christians themselves challenged their 'pagan' neighbours, "If you believe in your god's miracles through man-made statues, why do you not

<sup>5</sup> Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture, and Society in Late Medieval Writing* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 56.

<sup>6</sup> Cited in C. Finney, *The Invisible God: The Earliest Christians on Art* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 50-51.

believe in God's resurrection of the body?"<sup>7</sup> Both image and dead body are vessels through which agency can be conveyed, presence can appear and manifest itself.

The possibility of these material receptacles containing an effective as well as affecting presence was controversially brought to the fore during the crisis of Iconoclasm in eighth-century Byzantium. Iconoclasm forced theologians to address the problematic understanding of corporeality through the implications of the corporeality of images, and to attend to questions of iconicity, the possibility of representation in the image.<sup>8</sup> The iconophiles, the image-lovers who would eventually gain the upper hand, employed the doctrine of the incarnation in order to substantiate the use of images in popular and liturgical worship, as well as to authenticate the miracles they enacted. In this sense, what is particularly interesting in Byzantine iconophilia is the vindication of the liveliness of an image through the narrative of its conception; that is to say, the form of the image's coming into being explains and supports the efficacy of its coming to life.

Historians have no evidence of Christian art before the third century. It is therefore generally assumed that – in continuity with the aversion expressed by Paul – early Christian apologists were against the use of images, which in their Greco-Roman arena was believed to disclose an idolatrous paganism. Like their Jewish antecedents, they accused images of being “dead, and without souls,”<sup>9</sup> while somewhat contradictorily maintaining that they were the embodiment of evil demons and false gods.<sup>10</sup> During the period of persecution they are thought to have practised an ascetic and imageless form of devotion, and when in due course a Christian visual vocabulary materialized, it was mainly as a symbolic means of education and evangel rather than a site of worship. Nonetheless, the visible had always been a central theme in biblical Christianity (particularly in the Christian rereading of the Old Testament), from the emphatic textual antithesis between light and darkness, sight and blindness, to the multiple references to the invisibility of God being resolved through the visibility of Christ (“He who has seen me has seen the Father” *John* 14:9; 12:46). With the conversion of Constantine and the institutionalisation of Christianity, Roman propagandist imperial imagery replaced the previous

<sup>7</sup> Theophilus cited in Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians in the Mediterranean World from the Second Century AD to the Conversion of Constantine* (London: Penguin Books, 1986), 136.

<sup>8</sup> Whereas sixteenth-century iconoclasm and the ensuing Council of Trent, which reassessed the role of images, was concerned primarily with iconography.

<sup>9</sup> Justin Martyr, *Apologies* I, chapter 9, cited in Moshe Barasch, *Icon: Studies in the History of an Idea* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 100. Not only was the image dead, but the very ingredients of which it was made were inappropriately lifeless. In an indignant response to Constantia's request for an image of Christ, Eusebius of Caesaria writes of the inadequacy of “dead and inanimate colours” to portray the divine radiance. Cited in Cyril Mango (ed. and trans.), *The Art of the Byzantine Empire: Sources and Documents* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1972), 16. However, the same author recounts of a miracle enacted by a statuary image resembling Christ (Barasch, 147). On the attitude of the early Church towards images see also Finney C. Murray, “Art and the Early Church,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 28 (1977): 303-345.

palaeo-Christian art of the catacombs, and little changes were made to the iconography, form of display and its symbolic associations. Thus, from the didactic good Shepard, the figure of Christ becomes the regal and victorious representative of political power.<sup>11</sup>

This changeover would pave the way for image worship. With the emperor's consent and encouragement, the cult of the imperial portrait was supplanted by the Christian image, instilling the notion of continuity between image and prototype, so forceful an iconophile argument during the heat of the dispute.<sup>12</sup> Tangibility was a pivotal aspect of Christianity from the very start, and made itself felt in the increasing use of material "props" in the expression of the spirituality of the masses. Crosses and relics had been the objects of devotional practices ever since the fourth century, and were followed in no time by the veneration of icons. Most influential in this tendency towards a physical localisation of the holy was the rise of the cult of saints and the ensuing sanctification of their remains, possessions and images. Already towards the end of the fourth century, Augustine was publicizing relic miracles,<sup>13</sup> and by the end of the sixth century, saints were considered "living icons" throughout the duration of their terrestrial abode, and after death remained equally vital, effective, and *present* from the lair of their tombs. A tomb inscription reads: "Here lies Martin bishop [of Tours], of holy memory, whose soul is in the hand of God; but he is fully here, present and made plain in miracles of every kind."<sup>14</sup>

The saint became the impresario of the impulse to confer inanimate material objects with curative and protective efficacy, and both relic and icon became what Ernest Kitzinger has termed "an extension and executive organ of divine power,"<sup>15</sup> a visible puppet-like presence acting on behalf of the invisible agent. Miracles and visions played an important role in the finding of relics, in their authentication, and in determining their resting place; likewise, many images were thought to be manufactured supernaturally, with minimum, if any, human intervention. The material object behaved like its previous owner or subject by making known its wishes, enacting evangelical teachings, bleeding, sweating, bestowing gifts, attacking infidels and defending itself from their assaults, fulfilling promises and ensuring the fulfilment

<sup>10</sup> One of the signs of Christ's messiahship was his power to cast out demons (cf. *Matthew* 12:23-28; *Luke* 11:20): and indeed exorcism plays a central role in Christianity. Demons were thought to inhabit both people and objects, the latter being therefore animated by demonic forces.

<sup>11</sup> The imperial portrait was a crucial precedent for the notion of "presence" in the image. Cf. André Grabar, *L'Empereur dans l'Art Byzantin* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1971), and Belting, 102-14.

<sup>12</sup> For Greco-roman precedents of the prototype being manifest in its image, cf. Fox, chapter "Seeing the Gods," 103-167.

<sup>13</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, 22:8. Cf. B. Abou-El-Haj, *The Medieval Cult of Saints* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); James Bentley, *Restless Bones: The Story of Relics* (London: Constable, 1985); R.C. Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd. 1977).

<sup>14</sup> Peter Brown, *The Cult of Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 4.

<sup>15</sup> Ernest Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images in the Age Before Iconoclasm," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 8 (1954): 85-150, 104.

of vows made to it. The miracle of the inanimate coming to life played a pivotal role in effecting a pagan spectator's conversion, or a Christian's penitence, as well as the Christian consecration of many previously pagan sites. One might say that the bleeding image in particular epitomises the dead-alive image that despite its lifeless appearance haemorrhages life-essence as if to prove its vulnerable sentience. Its pulsating inside leaks through to the motionless outside. Nonetheless, it is important to note that iconographically the image depicted the living Christ, and it would not be until the eleventh century in the Latin West that the motif of the body of Christ emerging from the tomb became the accepted means of picturing the resurrection, inaugurating the representations of the dead-alive body.

In the course of the fifth century, both icon and relic received a practically identical form of devotion. Furthermore, the two were occasionally even fused into a single object, like the 'sacred dust' of ascetics such as Symeon the Younger, which was incorporated into commemorative portraits. Gregory of Nyssa's portrayal of the faithful approaching the casket of relics of the martyr Theodore soon became equally relevant to the attitude towards icons: "Those who behold them embrace them as if the living body itself; they bring [...] all their senses into play, and shedding tears of passion, they address to the martyr their prayers of intercession, as if he were alive and present."<sup>16</sup> The relic and icon were treated as some kind of *continuum* with the living saint, approached by devotees as an intercessionary two-way door through which grace might be mediated. The continuity is self-explanatory in the case of the physical remains of the dead; in the production of images, it was more complex. Human authorship was transcended in the creation of what might be termed contact-relic images, which, being supernaturally conceived, were beyond the artefactual or artistic, just as relics had no conceivable author other than the divine hand. Again, like many a relic, these images were traces or imprints, virtually a form of 'photographic' emanation, as opposed to a human fabrication. For, as evidenced in the biblical passages quoted earlier, the futile and lifeless artwork of mortals could hardly challenge the divine act of creation – "gods made with hands are not gods" according to the preaching of Paul (*Acts* 19:26). The most famous of legendary pre-iconoclastic *acheiropoietai*, as these images 'not made by human hands' were termed, were the *Mandyllion* cloth of Christ at Edessa and the Christ of Kamuliana (painted on canvas), prefigurations of the thirteenth-century *Veronica* (*vera icona*), and the famous modern example of the Turin Shroud.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *Hom. in S. Theod.*, PG 46.740B. Cited in Kitzinger, 83.

<sup>17</sup> Coincidentally, the word *acheiropoietai* first appears in Christian context in 2 *Corinthians* 5:1, where the term is used by the Apostle Paul to describe metaphorically the resurrected body of Christ. On *acheiropoietai* images, see Kitzinger; C. Schönborn, "Les icônes qui ne sont pas faites de main d'homme," *La Vie spirituelle* 140 (1986): 679-692; H. L. Kessler and G. Wolf (eds.), *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation* (Bologna: Nuova Alfa Editoriale, 1996); Belting, 47-77 and 208-224; Robin Cormack, *Painting the Soul: Icons, Death Masks and Shrouds* (London:



4. Master of Saint Veronica, *Saint Veronica with the Sudarium*, c. 1420.

Similarly, other miraculous icons, such as the famous Virgin of Saint Luke, had been started by an artist's hand, but ended up depicting themselves. Thus, both icon and relic became not only the historical evidence of a holy man's existence, but also an enduring manifestation of the holy man's sainthood, demonstrated time and again through his extra-temporal presence. Well beyond the distinct moment of its conception, the flow between image and prototype (that is to say the relic's originator or the imaged saint) remained constant. By no means was the icon merely a static and lifeless mirror-imprint, nor the relic simply a cadaverous leftover.

The intensification of the cult of images under the reign of Justinian II was largely what prompted the eruption of iconoclasm.<sup>18</sup> Iconoclasm and iconophilia alternated between the years 726 and 842, when, under the rule of the Empress Theodora, the controversy ended with the decisive triumph of the icon. Throughout, the icono-debates not only attacked or defended a certain use of images, but actually contracted or expanded the very definition of "image" in the process. The principal accusation of the iconoclast was idolatry, which repeated the long-standing premise of the futility and deadness of inanimate images. In the Council of 754, the iconoclastic position was defined as follows:

Men who have no hope of resurrection vainly attempt to represent what is not present as if it were present, but the Church of Christ, which contains no alien elements, rejects such satanic inventions. The saints live with God after their death on earth; to represent them by means of a dead art is to insult them. [...] For it is not lawful for Christians who believe in the

Reaktion Books, 1997). On the Turin Shroud see George Didi-Huberman's study "The Index of the Absent Wound (Monograph on a Stain)," *October* 29 (1984): 63-81.

<sup>18</sup> In addition to various other factors such as a reassertion of political power, the ascent of the new aniconic religion of Islam, the superstition of Emperor Leo III who interpreted the eruption of a marine volcano as sign of God's indignation at the idolatry of his people, and so on.

resurrection to adopt the costumes of demon-worshipping gentiles and to insult by means of inglorious and dead matter the saints who will be adorned with so much glory.<sup>19</sup>

The discourse of resurrection appears in contrast to the practice of image-worship. Images are denounced for attempting to bring into existence the invisible and absent “as if it were present,” for confusing the glory of those who will join God in resurrection with an earthly and irreversible death. In essence, the conflict revolved around the capacity and adequacy of visible material objects to serve as a vehicle for divine agency. It follows that the central issue soon became the circumscribability and representability of the divine, in other words, the full extent of the true humanity of Christ. Image-makers and worshippers were accused of violating the doctrine of the Incarnation (and, correspondingly, the doctrine of the Resurrection), in that they represented and revered the image of the flesh alone, thus divorcing or confusing the two inseparable yet theomorphically distinct natures of mortal and immortal.

For iconoclasts, the only sanctioned channels of worship were the Eucharist, the church and the sign of the cross; relics and icons were illegitimately consecrated from below by the general populace, and were therefore dangerously uncontrollable. Then again, early Christians had already praised the immediacy and accessibility of the image by hailing it as the “book of the illiterate.” But despite the fact that much of the rise in image worship was actually due to the popular call for a tangible localisation of the holy, pro-image apologists such as John of Damascus (and later Theodore of Stoudious and Patriarch Nikephoros I) were predominantly intent on subtracting the icon from the sphere of its viewer in order to anchor it in a transcendental relationship with its divine archetype. In a cautious response to iconoclastic accusations, Christian iconophiles made a clear division between idols, thought to embody the deity, and icons, which *reflect* or *participate* in it, by way of hypostasis. Correspondingly, a distinction was made between images worshipped in themselves as autonomous, and those instrumental, transparent and intercessionary images worshipped for what they represent. The iconoclast saw no difference whatsoever, and in truth, beyond the actual form of homage, more often than not what the image enabled, brought about or did, was virtually equivalent in both circumstances. The iconoclastic indistinction was in a sense endorsed by the iconophilic focus on the evidence of miracles, which practically overshadowed the theological subtleties. In the second Council of Nicaea, held in 787, it was claimed that not only had icons existed erstwhile in a tradition that could be traced back to the period of Christ, but a list of miracles was drawn up that illustrated the intervention of the live and real presence of the divine persons depicted. The *acheiropoietai* served as an extremely convenient argument in response to the iconoclast’s accusation of idolatry. The danger of being accused of the gullible belief in the animation of a human artefact could be easily avoided, and, in turn, the iconoclast was

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<sup>19</sup> Trans. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire*, 167.

defied to disbelieve in the powers of the Almighty. Moreover, the putative insolence of individual creativity, i.e. the representation of “what is not present” (cf. above *Romans* 4:17), was challenged by the contention that icons represented only that which had existed historically. Iconophilia completely overrode mortal creation and creativity.

Unsurprisingly, many of the miracles enlisted referred to images defying their own destruction and subsequently causing the conversion of Jews, the “original” advocates of aniconism. We are told of the welling of blood and water from an icon of Christ which some Jews had wounded with a lance in order to mock the prototype portrayed.<sup>20</sup> But often it was not the person depicted but the substance of the image itself that worked the miracle: a sick woman was cured by removing a small portion of a wall painting of the saints “with her nails, crushing it to powder with chrism, putting it in water and drinking the mixture, whereupon immediately she was restored to health.”<sup>21</sup> And what was true of icons in relation to participation in divine energies, was plainly true of relics: “Demons are often driven away by use of the relics of martyrs... tell me, how many overshadowings, how many exudations, and often flows of blood too, have come from icons and relics of martyrs... If God works miracles through bones, it is obvious that he can do so through icons and stones and many other things.”<sup>22</sup> As made manifest by the person of the saint and the “epiphanies” of his inanimate remains or extensions, the divine was actively present and alive in, or rather through, the secular world. With the triumph of iconophilia, the realm of the visible/tangible had been vindicated and rehabilitated, as were the senses engaged in perceiving it.<sup>23</sup> The Incarnation was used to substantiate the divine nature of the material image, for if Christ was the true hypostatic *eikon* of the invisible father (*Colossians* 1:15), an icon was in turn a hypostatic image of that image, and so forth, leading to the self-replicating *acheiropoietai* and even the man-made copies of the same. Matter had been elevated and transformed through the miracle of the Incarnation, the very same miracle that the icon continually re-enacted through its analogous “humiliation” and descent into matter – every secretion of blood echoed Christ’s bleeding, every act of healing reaffirmed Christ’s beneficial powers, and every evidence of life from the inanimate affirmed the glory of resurrection.

Indeed, the issue of the tangibility of the God incarnate was reiterated in the discussions on resurrection, and it is telling that for several hundreds of years (particularly in the West) discussions on resurrection would occur in the context of relic cult. Of course, relics of the corporeal remains of Christ or of the Virgin – once her assumption into heaven was generally

<sup>20</sup> Athanasius the Great, *On the Miracle worked in the city of Beirut by the Icon of our Lord Jesus Christ, our True God*, PG 28, 805-12. Trans. in A. Giakalis, *Images of the Divine: The Theology of Icons at the Seventh Ecumenical Council* (Leiden, New York, Köln: E.J. Brill, 1994), 46-49.

<sup>21</sup> *Mansi* 13, 64B-65D; 68D. *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Mansi* 13, 48C; 52A. *Ibid.*, 128.



accepted and promoted – were out of the question, and, possibly as a consequence, almost all *acheiropoietai* were contact-relics of these two figures. On the other hand, relics of saintly mortals were in truth the ultimate suppression of the fact of death, as the souls of the relic-owners were thought to enjoy deep sleep in paradise before the resurrection and restitution of their former bodies. As Peter Brown has perceptively observed in his study on the *Cult of the Saints*, the relic abolished human time, its traffic added an indeterminacy of space, and its compact miniaturization appropriately expressed the “inverted magnitude” of the link between Heaven and Earth – wherever the smallest portion of a saint was to be found, there he was in his entirety.<sup>24</sup> If the incorrupt integrity of the resurrected body could defy the dispersion of death, it was obviously even more triumphant in reversing the fragmentation of the relic. Theories concerning resurrection were for the most part extremely literalist and physicalist: the corporeal body of this world was held to be the same one that after its fall (for *cadaver* originates from the verb *cadere*, to fall) would rise again resurrected and intact. Likewise, the controlled, lightened and hardened bodies of the hermits and holy virgins were understood to move already during life towards the subtlety and impassibility they would have in paradise. Their bodies hinted at the glory to come. Thus, the resurrection body to which the Cappadocians and Augustine had referred to in the fourth and fifth centuries *was* the body of the saint, which, as Caroline Bynum writes, “had begun to be a relic whilst still alive.”<sup>25</sup> This notion was later continued and heightened particularly by twelfth-century theologians, as bodies, both living and dead, began to behave on earth as if they were already glorified in heaven; miracles of inedia, life without eating, and incorruption, death without decay, proliferate in the West during this period. Correspondingly, the race for holy cadavers was an unprecedentedly frantic and gruesome operation. Never for an instant doubting the overachiever’s integrity, the faithful deliberately fragmented holy bodies immediately after death; they were eviscerated, then boiled to remove the flesh, after which they were politically distributed between the religious communities. Almost as a response to this violent dismemberment, saintly bodies not only defied the corruption and disintegration of death, but simultaneously resisted the fragmentation of the relic, remaining whole so as to become in their entirety an absolute and most perfect relic. These incorrupt cadavers were the literal sleeping body, which had overcome death, decay, and time itself. Tombs of saints such as Saint Cuthbert (†687) were opened, exposing the perfumed miracle of incorrupt flesh. His body was found by monks to be

undecayed as when they had buried it eleven years before. The skin had not decayed nor grown old, nor the sinews become dry, making the body tautly stretched and stiff; but the

<sup>23</sup> Cf. J. Pelikan, *Imago Dei: The Byzantine Apologia for Icons* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990).

<sup>24</sup> Brown, 78.

limbs lay at rest with all the appearance of life and were still moveable at the joints. For the knees and neck were like those of a living man; and when they lifted him from the tomb, they could bend him as they wished.<sup>26</sup>

The incorrupt body was a moveable, articulated, responsive body, one in which rigor mortis had not set. To assume that the bodies of the saints died and rotted was heretical,<sup>27</sup> and to assist the defence the clergy used the empirical evidence of these miracles, for through them the future miracle of resurrection was graphically enacted in the material world of the present. In a sermon preached in the mid-twelfth century, Peter the Venerable asserted “we do not debase as inanimate, despise as insensate, or trample under foot like the cadavers of dumb beasts the bodies of those who in this life cultivated justice; rather we venerate them as temples of the Lord... preserve them as vessels of resurrection to be joined again to the blessed souls...”<sup>28</sup> These incorrupt bodies were anything but inanimate, insentient or horizontally buried, and were touched with uninhibited familiarity: exhumed, cleaned, undressed, eviscerated to reveal further miracles (miniature instruments of the passion in the heart, for example), embalmed, dressed and exhibited to the faithful. Preservation was not viewed as a deception, but rather its success provided additional proof of the sainthood of the dead body. Paradise in the Medieval (and in the Renaissance) mind was “a dream of permanent embalming, of ‘impassibility’ [‘incapacity to suffer either pain or detriment,’ OED]... of the blessed, of the incorruptibility of the flesh... a laboratory of physical restoration.”<sup>29</sup> The incorrupt cadaver was a palpable paradise in the flesh.

If the Christian image has revealed itself closely related to the cadaver – evoking notions of unity within the fragment, of presence manifest in absence, of life emerging from death, animate energies from stillness – all of these characteristics are perfectly merged in the incorrupt cadaver. The dead body has *become* its own image, and the image is a living-dead body. To return to the poetic words of Blanchot, images

<sup>25</sup> Caroline W. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 200.

<sup>26</sup> Cited in David Rollason, *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 36; cf. Abou-El-Haj, *The Medieval Cult of Saints*, 51. See also David Rollason, “Le corps incorruptible de Saint Cuthbert et l’église de Durham vers l’an 1100,” *Les Reliques: Objets, Cultes, Symboles. Actes du Colloque International de l’Université du Littoral-Côte d’Opale*, 4-6 Septembre 1997, eds. E. Bozóky and A.-M. Helvétius (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 1999), 313-320. More generally on incorrupt cadavers see M. Bouvier, “De l’incorruptibilité des corps saints,” *Les Miracles, Miroirs des Corps*, eds. J. Gelis and O. Redon (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 1983), 193-221.

<sup>27</sup> Bynum, 217.

<sup>28</sup> Peter the Venerable, “Sermo in honore sancti illius cuius reliquiae sunt in presenti.” Cited in Caroline Bynum, “Material Continuity, Personal Survival and the Resurrection of the Body: A Scholastic Discussion in its Medieval and Modern Contexts,” *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 263-5.

<sup>29</sup> Piero Camporesi, *The Incorruptible Flesh: Bodily Mutation and Mortification in Religion and Folklore*, trans. T. Croft-Murray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 25. Camporesi elaborates on this tradition in later texts dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth century.

have no guarantee but a cadaver... the pure formality of the image is fundamentally linked to the elemental strangeness and to the shapeless heaviness of the being that is present in absence.... The cadaver is its own image... The cadaver is reflection making itself master of the reflected life, absorbing it, substantially identifying itself with it... It is the equal, equal to an absolute, overwhelming, marvellous degree.<sup>30</sup>

The incorrupt cadaver presents the viewer with an intact relic, the trace and remains of what is absent as well as an integral and effective presence – in short, it is the most appropriate and evocative example of an image which overrides the traditional accusation of its lifelessness, both past and present. Its relation to its prototype is indisputable, collapsing any distance between copy and original, animated and animator, “puppet” and “puppeteer.” At the same time, it is a condensation of the rhythms of animation and de-animation. In it the body has decelerated into stillness without truly dying, and its aliveness, apparent in its puppet-like articulations and non-decay, is in suspended animation. The miracle is its obedient *pliability*.<sup>31</sup>

“Tell us, Father, what is the perfect and best form of obedience?” [ask St. Francis’ companions] In reply he described true and perfect obedience under the simile of a dead body. “Take up a dead body,” he said, “and lay it where you will. You will see that it does not resist being removed, or complain of its position, or ask to be left alone. If it is lifted on to a chair, it does not look up, but down. If it is clothed in purple, it looks paler than ever. In the same way, one who is truly obedient does not question why he is moved, does not mind where he is placed, and does not demand to be transferred.”<sup>32</sup>

This slightly macabre definition of obedience, originating from *The Mirror of Perfection*, an account of the life of St. Francis by one of his contemporaries, highlights the dead body’s submission to the motor agency of another. This limplimbed puppet is the most obedient, compliant, pliable of bodies (and minds). Furthermore, it opens up to an aspect of performativity inherent to the being-moved of a lifeless thing. The dead and apparently incorrupt body is brought out to “play,” as it were (St. Francis no doubt meant this metaphorically, although certain enactments discussed below and in the next chapter allow one to lend this a more literal tone). The body is seated and dressed up, it conveys a humility and passivity that somehow impart it the lifelikeness of a humble religious man.

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<sup>30</sup> Blanchot, 83.

<sup>31</sup> This correlates to articulated suits of armour, which also interestingly imply hollowness and agency (cf. chapter 6 on Schlemmer). For an interesting study of armour in relation to training the body in the sixteenth century, see Georges Vigarello, “The Upward Training of the Body from the Age of Chivalry to Courtly Civility,” *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, vol. 2, eds. M. Feher, R. Naddaff and N. Tazi (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 149-199.

<sup>32</sup> *The Mirror of Perfection* 48, in *S. Francis of Assisi: His Life and Writings as recorded by his Contemporaries*, trans. L.A.R. Sherley-Price (London: Mowbray & Co. Ltd., 1959), 60.

According to Michel Serres in his book *Statues: Le Second Livre de Fondations*, all statues (his use of the term is multifaceted) are somehow reliquaries, a *boîte noire* that is always a tombstone or grave metaphorically inscribed with the words *ci-gît*, 'here lies'.<sup>33</sup> This assumption sheds light on both the deadness and the aliveness of the sculptural image. It is most extraordinary that at the same time the phenomenon of incorrupt cadavers populated the Western Middle Ages as never before, sculptures started to re-emerge after centuries of suspicion. Three-dimensional images, more so than painted images, had long been feared as idolatrous graven images, as they presented too real and challenging an occupation of space. Given the synchrony, it is as though to some extent sculpture could return to the pedestal in light of the incorrupt corpse that enabled its redemption. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the return of sculptural tomb slabs in the eleventh century, after *ca.* 800 years of their disappearance into flatness.<sup>34</sup> The bodies of the dead seemed suddenly to engender their hardened and imperishable doubles in sculptural form; as though discontent with the invisibility of burial, they required an additional endurance in the realm of the visible and tactile. In the convex of the cadaver, reliquary or tomb sculpture, the dangers of artifice were removed, its veneration hardly questioned, and the implication of it being a crystallized body closely bound to animate life (past or present) was obvious. These images, very literally containers or markers of death – not unlike the volcanised bodies of the citizens of Pompeii – fix in place the relationship between subjects and objects,<sup>35</sup> the living and the dead. The Byzantine specular image (created and effective as imprint, emanation or reflection of life, typified by the icon or contact-relic) finds its equivalent in the Medieval West with the image as fossil (created and effective as life itself solidified). Thus, from the ninth century onwards, the corporeal relic is accompanied by a proliferation of sculptural counterparts, very often relic-cases in the shape of a human figure or a part of a human figure. These latter reliquaries have been termed 'talking relics' or 'shaped reliquaries',<sup>36</sup> and often question or reaffirm the relation of shape to content. The relic, the fragmented bodily remains, requires a body to house it. Almost the opposite of a prosthetic limb (although strangely comparable in appearance), the shaped reliquary stands in for the body that it has lost, *fleshes it out*.

<sup>33</sup> Michel Serres, *Statues: Le Second Livre de Fondations* (Paris: Éditions François Bourin, 1987).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Erwin Panofsky, *Tomb Sculpture: Its Changing Aspects from Ancient Egypt to Bernini* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1964), particularly "The Early Christian Period and the Middle Ages North of the Alps," 39-66.

<sup>35</sup> Serres, 42-3.

<sup>36</sup> On reliquaries see Cyrthia Hahn, "The Voices of the Saints: Speaking Reliquaries," *Gesta* 36, 1 (1997): 20-31, who claims that the relation of shape to content is not always congruous and was often dictated by liturgical functions rather than what the image actually contained. Nonetheless, I would still argue that even if the shape of the body part is anatomically incorrect, as it were, it still refers to a body, just as a reliquary containing a piece of wood from the true cross engenders the shape of the cross it contained (and not the literal part of the cross it might belong to). See also Anton Legner, *Feliquien in Kunst und Kult: zwischen Antike und Aufklärung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995); Caroline W. Bynum and Paula Gerson, "Body-Part Reliquaries and Body Parts in the Middle Ages," *Gesta* 36, 1 (1997) 3-19.



5. Reliquary Arm, Mosan, ca. 1230.

The prevalence of relic (as opposed to icon or image) veneration was a markedly Western phenomenon. In the Western response to the Byzantine crisis of Iconoclasm, the *Libri Carolini* (ca. 790) of Charlemagne, the distinction was clearly stated. The image was merely an educational and ornamental instrument, of no inherent sacred worth.<sup>37</sup> It was not to be equated with the relic,

...for the latter [relics] come from a body or have been in contact with a body... and will rise again in glory with the saints at the end of the world... But images... have neither lived, nor will they rise again but, as we know, will be burned or will decay, and they merely obstruct us in the adoration that is due to God alone.<sup>38</sup>

In theory, according to the Western position, images were far from being a locus of passage towards the divine; they were but lifeless barriers. Only a relic could re-awaken and rise again. Images representing the saints would remain eternally horizontal as they rotted into the earth. How true this was with regard to their usage in devotional practice is hard to determine. In fact, not long after, the earliest surviving statuary relic was created, containing the body of Sainte Foy, a third-century martyr whose body was stolen by Conques in 865. This figural reliquary drastically reversed the *Libri Carolini's* assumption of an opposition between images and relics, as the two were reconciled in their literal assimilation. During the eleventh century, Sainte Foy's cult was greatly enlarged, and for this reason Bernard of Angers went to Auvergne

<sup>37</sup> Whereas in Byzantine devotional practice the relation between image and prototype was more or less exact and unmediated, in Western devotional practices the similarity between the two was emphasised through the active discernment of the worshipper. See Jack Greenstein, "On Alberti's 'Sign': Vision and Composition in the Quattrocento Painting," *Art Bulletin* 79 (1997): 669-98.

<sup>38</sup> *Libri Carolini* 3.24 (H. Bastgen, *Monumenta Germaniae Historia Legum* 3, Concilia 2, supp. (Hanover, 1924), 153-4). Trans. Belting, "Appendix: Texts on the History and Use of Images and Relics," *Likeness and Presence*, 533.

to scrutinize the miraculous powers of the statue. In line with the customary disapproval, his initial reaction was suspicious and elitist, accusing the believers of gullible ignorance. The statue of Sainte Foy, he wrote, was

considered a superstition by enlightened people and seems at first sight to continue the cult of gods or demons... As true veneration is only fittingly directed at God, it seems absurd to make statues of stone, wood, and bronze, unless of our Lord on the Cross... [and] thoughtlessly direct prayers at an object without language or soul...<sup>39</sup>

Nonetheless, Bernard was gradually convinced of its efficacy and, together with a list of verified miracles – the most famous of which recalled the healing of a blind pilgrim, appropriately reiterative of its own visual nature – wrote the following:

...the statue is honoured in memory of the holy martyr in order to glorify the highest God. Today I regret my foolishness towards this friend of God... Her image is not an impure idol but a holy memento that invites pious devotion and strengthens our wish for the powerful intercession of the saint. To be more precise, it is nothing but a casket that holds the venerable relics of the virgin. The goldsmith has given it a human form in his own way. The statue is as famous as once was the ark of the covenant but has a still more precious content in the form of the complete skull of the martyr.<sup>40</sup>

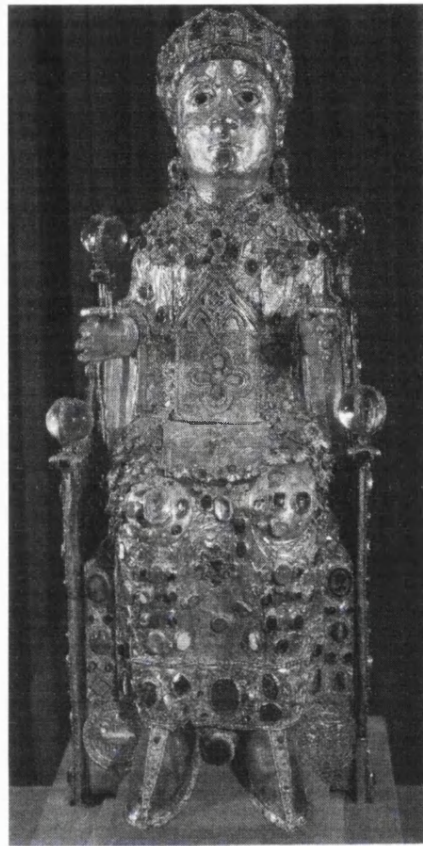
Unlike the Byzantine icon, the reliquary referred to by Bernard of Angers allows for a human author: the goldsmith. Created by human hands, the statue is not a mirroring receptacle but rather a carrier, a casket, a holy memento. What's more, it is precisely the image's three-dimensional hollowness that activates its sanctity, in striking contrast to the many iconophobic accusations in which emptiness appears as a trait to be derided. The image-vessel has become a contiguous layer of its content, a capacious skin of gold foil and gems proffering its kernel a new body. In other words, like a fossil, it is a part of the life form it both contains and depicts, presents and represents, and it is from this premise that the image appears "animated by such a living expression that his eyes seemed fixed upon us and the people could read from the lustre of these eyes whether their plea had been heard."<sup>41</sup> Images thus not only took on a new

<sup>39</sup> Bernard of Angers, *Liber miraculorum sancte Fidis* 1.13. Trans. Belting, "Appendix," 536. For an extremely useful study on the statue see Kathleen Ashley and Pamela Sheingorn, *Writing Faith: Text, Sign and History in the Miracles of Sainte Foy* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press: 1999).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* The life-likeness of an image is a long-established ekphrastic trope used to illustrate its representational realism or verisimilitude. It remains difficult to make a clear-cut distinction between those examples in which the realism is thought to be merely stylistic and those in which it is considered truly animate. Thus for example the eleventh century Byzantine writer Michael Psellus termed the new style of icons 'living painting', yet his praise seems aimed at the formal quality of expression more than at the actual life in the image (Michael Psellus, *Treatise on an icon of the Crucifixion*, trans. Belting, 529.). With the revival of sculpture in the West during the twelfth century, sculptors were called *magister lapidis vivi*, 'master of living stone' (Camille, *The Gothic Idol*, 36), but again, more than necessarily implying life in the stone such praise seems to denote a talent for creating resemblance.

physicality, literally reversing the relic by recreating convex figural stratum, but genuinely incorporated and encapsulated a body or parts of it.



6. Statuary relic of Sainte Foy, 9<sup>th</sup> century and later.

Statuary relics honoured the body parts of the saint. For the Virgin and Christ, of whom there were no bodily relics, other forms of images were conjured. These were the figure of the *Thronum Majestatis*, Throne of Wisdom (which all the same frequently had a small compartment in which relics such as scraps of the Virgin's mantle were contained<sup>42</sup>) and the image of the Crucified, again, both sculptural and sizeable, if not life-size in proportions. Thus, not only the image-relic but also the image per se awakened to a chorus of speech and gestures during this period, rousing a particular commotion or indeed "interactivity"<sup>43</sup> in the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.<sup>44</sup> Saint Francis of Assisi, in his day considered an *alter*

<sup>42</sup> In Hugh of Poitiers's *Historia Vizeliacensis Monasterii* 4 (ca.1160), he describes a wooden statue of the Virgin in which a small and secret door was discovered between the shoulders, containing a lock of hair of the Virgin, a bone of hers and of John the Baptist as well as some of the Apostles. Cited in Ilene H. Forsyth, *Thrones of Wisdom: Wood Sculptures of the Madonna in Romanesque France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 32-33.

<sup>43</sup> I take the term from David Morgan's *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1998), 50.

<sup>44</sup> The main source for images coming to life is to be found in hagiographic accounts of the lives of saints and in collections of miracles. To name just a few: Peter Damian's *De apparitionibus et miraculis* (early eleventh century), the twelfth century collections of Gautier de Cluny, Honorius Augustodunensis, Peter the Venerable, the thirteenth century texts of Caesarius of Heisterbach, Gautier de Coinci, followed by Vincent de Beauvais's famous *Speculum Maius*, and Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea*.

*Christus*, was instrumental in awakening images to life, not only in terms of the representational realism later associated with the Franciscan school, but in the literal sense of bringing objects to life. His popular accessibility was implemented by a strong use of visual imagery, often more sculptural than plane. Already his biographers describe the miraculous event that led to his conversion in terms of a speaking image. He was fervently praying to a painted crucifix (that is to say, an image of Christ painted on the sculptural surface of a crucifix rather than on a square panel) in the church of San Damiano, when

...something unheard of happened to him: the painted image of Christ crucified moved its lips and spoke. Calling him by name it said 'Francis, go, repair my house, which as you see, is falling completely to ruin.' Trembling, Francis was not a little amazed and became almost deranged by these words... What a wonderful thing and a thing unheard of in our times! Who is not astonished at these things? Who has ever heard like things? Who would doubt that Francis, returning to his native city, appeared crucified, when, though he had not yet outwardly completely renounced the world, Christ had spoken to him from the wood of the cross in a new and unheard of miracle?... Indeed, he never forgot to be concerned about that holy image, and he never passed over its command with negligence.<sup>45</sup>

This kind of miracle was not as unheard of as the author Thomas of Celano tries to make out.<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, the writer's affected astonishment, an echo of the saint's own "deranged" bewilderment, proves just how compelling such events had become. In 1223, a similar miraculous account took place in Greccio during the staging of what was called the *presepio* ('nativity crib'), a further visual tradition propagated by Saint Francis. In addition to the Franciscan use of lively and expressive sermons, theatrical reenactments of the bible were "set before [the] bodily eyes" of an audience. To celebrate the nativity, Saint Francis (after asking for due permission from Pope Onorius III) recreated the settings of the infant Christ in Bethlehem using a manger for a crib, some hay and a real ox and ass. As a culminating final touch, the saint's embrace gave life to what is generally assumed to be an effigy of the infant Jesus, although the text is far from explicit: "The gift of the almighty was multiplied there, and a wonderful vision was seen by a certain virtuous man. For he saw a little child lying in the manger lifeless, and he saw the holy man of God [Francis] go up to it and rouse the child as from a deep sleep."<sup>47</sup> It is as though images, moving on from the symptoms of wounded life

<sup>45</sup> Thomas of Celano, *The Second Life of Saint Francis*, VI, trans. and ed. M.A. Habig, *Saint Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies* (Illinois: Franciscan Press, 1991), 370-371.

<sup>46</sup> Undoubtedly this is the author's way of emphasising the hotly debated sainthood of Saint Francis, whose stigmatisation was a truly 'unheard of' and novel miracle. He was in fact canonized only two years after his death. For references to later speaking crucifixes, see Miklos Boskowitz, "Immagine e Preghiera nel Tardo Medioevo: Osservazioni Preliminari" *Immagini da Meditare: Ricerche su Dipinti di Tema Religioso nei Secoli XII-XV* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1994), 73-106, 80, note 17. Boskowitz emphasizes the manner of prayer as related to the type of animation, as though a specific type of devotion were the animating cause.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas of Celano, *The First Life of Saint Francis*, XXX. Habig, 300-1. Agamben, in contrast, provides a fascinating interpretation of the nativity crib as "the world of the fable precisely at the moment when it wakes from



such as bleeding, crying, sweating, became the submissive corpses of obedience Saint Francis had preached of the religious man. These yielding figures were increasingly prop-like, serving a tactile function of enactment without questioning or resisting “being removed.” On the contrary, this prop-like tendency would facilitate their coming to life.

Already a century earlier Saint Bernard of Clairvaux had prayed before an image of the crucified Christ, which then leant forward to embrace him.<sup>48</sup> An even more erotically charged story is told of Saint Bernard in which a statue of the Virgin pressed milk from her breasts to comfort, succour and nourish him.<sup>49</sup> Often, especially when Christ and the Virgin were involved, the sensual encounter with an image coming to life served as an antidote to sexual temptation. In his *Dialogus Miraculorum*, the Cistercian monk Caesarius of Heisterbach (†1240) tells an anecdote of the monk Peter from Coblenz who was meditating before the image of the Crucifix, when

behold there stood before him the Lord Jesus himself – or rather, Lord Jesus as if he were hanging upon the Cross. Then He withdrew his most merciful arms from the cross, embraced his servant, drawing him to his breast as one being dear to him, in sign of mutual friendship. He clasped him close; and by that embrace destroyed his [Peter's] strongest temptations.<sup>50</sup>

We have few theories of image and prototype (in comparison to those of Byzantium) to clarify exactly who or what enabled the image to come to life. Caesarius' clarification of it being Christ “as if he were hanging on the cross” as opposed to Christ “himself” only renders the matter more confusing, as do the recurrent allusions to such events being of an inner contemplative or visionary nature. In one of the crucial documents of medieval aesthetics, that is to say the debate which took place between the Abbot of Saint Denis, Suger, and Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, the main concerns are not with the possibility or cause of miraculous images coming to life, but rather the appropriateness of images in devotional practice and in the decoration of the church. Suger more or less continues anagogical notions in line with Byzantine iconophilia (the lavish material world as a passage to the realm of the immaterial), whilst Saint Bernard advocates the “poor” Cistercian austere and anti-figurative aesthetic.

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enchantment to enter history,” showing through the image of the miniature nativity crib (popular from the eighteenth century on) its profane disenchantment and non-animation. Giorgio Agamben, “Fable and History: Considerations on the Nativity Crib,” *Infancy and History: Essays on the Destruction of Experience*, trans. L. Heron (London: Verso, 1993), 125-132.

<sup>48</sup> *De vita et gestis Bernardi*, lib. 7 (*Exordium magnum Cisterciense*, lib. 7 cap. 7; PL CLXXXV, coll. 419-420). Cited in Freedberg, 305.

<sup>49</sup> This is thought to be a later iconographic invention, inspired by his use of the metaphor of lactation in his writings (see AA SS (August), 4:206-7). Cf. C. Depeux, “Saint Bernard dans l'Iconographie Médiévale: L'Exemple de la Lactation,” *Vies et légendes de Saint Bernard: Création, diffusion, réception (XII-XX Siècles)*, Actes des Rencontres de Dijon 7-8 Juin 199 (Cîteaux: Commentari Cistercienses, 1993), 152-164. Cf. Caroline W. Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (California: University of California Press, 1982), 110-169.

<sup>50</sup> Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus miraculorum*, cited in Freedberg, 306. The same author recounts of a more violent image smiting a sinful nun to rid her of her desires for a clerk (p. 309).

Despite his own use of sensual imagery and his encouragement of a deep emotional involvement with the humanity of God, Bernard's disapproval as expressed in his *Apologia* is essentially of the "carnal;"<sup>51</sup> using a condescendingly aristocratic and feudal model, he distinguishes between a monastic and a popular "carnal" audience, the latter being incapable of abstraction and an imageless devotion.

But it was in fact to this very carnal audience that Saint Francis and the mendicant orders appealed, and that was at the source of their success. As Mikhail Bakhtin points out in his study of the carnivalesque: "Francis called himself and his companions 'God's jugglers' (*ioculatores Domini*). Francis' peculiar world outlook, his 'spiritual joy' (*laetitia spiritualis*), his blessing of the material bodily principle, and its typically Franciscan degradations and profanation can be defined, with some exaggeration, as a carnivalized Catholicism."<sup>52</sup> This new carnality can be seen as a truly literal aesthetics of Incarnation, a series of examples of flesh engaging with flesh.<sup>53</sup> Images tend to celebrate the God made man, in all his proximity, likeness and imitability. These various manifestations, from the abundance of incorrupt bodies and relics, to the restoration of sculpture, to the nascent popularity of theatre, all appear to coincide with a new sense of body, of the *corpo-real*,<sup>54</sup> whereby the substance of the representation or presentation is of a bodily nature. Parts or all of a real body become an image latently alive, whilst images appear more and more as genuine embodiments. Indeed, Saint Francis's *presepio* enactment can be seen as a celebration of the incarnate Christ, the tangible and familiar infant God. His embrace reaffirmed the doctrine of the *filioque*, the emanation of the Holy Spirit from the Father *and* from the Son, decreed in Toledo in 589 and refused by the Eastern Church. To paraphrase Rosario Assunto, every subsequent representation of the Holy Crib displayed an emancipation and a victory over Byzantium,<sup>55</sup> emphasising an aesthetics of the incarnate and *corpo-real*. Thus, Saint Francis of Assisi was considered a tangible and living icon of Christ on earth, incarnating to the highest degree the increasingly theatrical form of piety known as *imitatio Christi*, the simulation of the life of Christ. This he achieved not only through his life style and deeds, but also in becoming the actual image of Christ through the unprecedented miracle of the stigmata of the Crucified, imprinted in his very flesh. Shortly after, an image of this image – the Pisan portrait of Saint Francis depicting his stigmata – would in turn bleed to challenge doubting beholders.<sup>56</sup> How very befitting that such a perfect image,

<sup>51</sup> *S. Bernardi Opera*, vol. 8, *Tractatus et opuscula*, eds. J. Leclercq, and H.M. Rochais (Rome: Editions Cistercienses, 1963), 63-108. Cf. also C. Rudolf, *The Things of Greater Importance: Bernard de Clairvaux's Apologia and the Medieval Attitude Towards Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990).

<sup>52</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. H. Iswolsky (Massachusetts: The M.I.T. Press, 1968), 57.

<sup>53</sup> Coincidentally, this is also the dawning of the age of courtly as well as mystical love.

<sup>54</sup> I use the word 'corpo-real' as distinct from 'realistic,' which apart from being relative to a specific culture, usually alludes to an effect of lifelikeness in the representation. Although the period in question is generally associated with a newfound lifelikeness, my emphasis is on the incarnate and tangible development of imagery, as elucidated in the example of the Eucharist (see below).

<sup>55</sup> Rosario Assunto, *La Critica d'Arte nel Pensiero Medievale* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1961).

<sup>56</sup> Belting, 381.

the body of the saint, should remain incorrupt after death, "as though he were living, not dead... his members had taken on the softness and pliability of an innocent child's members."<sup>57</sup>

One of the most momentous expressions of this *corpo-reality* is without doubt the doctrine of the Transubstantiation of the Eucharist, proposed by the fourth Lateran Council of 1215 and officially introduced into the Church calendar in 1311 as the Feast of the *Corpus Christi*. Since early Christian times the consecrated host had been considered a sacramental sign or symbol; now, however, it had become a material substance capable of transforming into God's Flesh, of becoming the real presence of Christ. The doctrine outlined in 1215 stated that "Jesus Christ himself is priest and sacrifice, whose body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar beneath the species of bread and wine; the bread being transubstantiated into the body and the wine into blood, by Divine power."<sup>58</sup> No wonder then that from the thirteenth century onwards the Host was considered the single most important image and object to Western Christians (a doctrine rejected in the East). This image *was* its prototype. It became *the* relic of the body of Christ. *Hoc est Corpus meum* ("This is my body"), the words spoken by Christ at the last supper and repeated by a priest every time he celebrates the sacrament of the Eucharist during the Mass, are at the foundations of the newfound representational practices I have been associating with the *corpo-real*. Many fortunate viewers witnessed the miracle of seeing the Host become a little child, the infant Jesus, or even, as in one of the most famous stories, a very small piece of bloody flesh, to the shame of a female communicant receiving communion who had been unbelieving of the words "This is my body."<sup>59</sup> Such sacramental realism<sup>60</sup> is thought to have coincided with or perhaps even caused a profound change in the modes of perception, as well as in the forms of representation.<sup>61</sup> The notion of transubstantiation is fundamentally a theatrical one, even when performativity is at its bare minimum. One has only to turn to Stanislavskian acting technique, highly criticized by Brecht: "The actor *transforms* himself, just like during mass, bread transforms itself to flesh."<sup>62</sup> This

<sup>57</sup> Thomas of Celano, *The First Life of Saint Francis*, IX. Habig, 326.

<sup>58</sup> *Concilium Lateranense*, in Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* (Graz: 1960), 22:982. Trans. Camille, 215-16. Cf. *1 Corinthians* 11:23-26. See also Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>59</sup> G.J.C. Snoek, *Medieval Piety from Relics to the Eucharist: A Process of Mutual Interaction* (Leiden, New York, Köln: E.J. Brill, 1995), 315. As this book discusses in great length, the Eucharist started to effect miracles very similar to relics and the incorruption of saintly cadavers. See also V.A. Kolve, *A Play called Corpus Christi* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1966). For miracles of the Eucharist that prompt conversion, see Miri Rubin, "The Eucharist and the Construction of Medieval Identities," *Culture and History 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writings*, ed. D. Aers (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1992), 43-64. Cf. Piero Camporesi, "The Consecrated Host: A Wondrous Excess," *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, vol. 1., 220-37.

<sup>60</sup> Bedos-Rezak, provides a useful account of the varied notions of realism in medieval studies, in "Medieval Identity: A Sign and a Concept," 1500, ff. 33.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Jean Wirth, "L'Apparition du Surnaturel dans l'Art du Moyen Age," *L'Image et la Production du Sacré*, Actes du colloque de Strasbourg 20-21 Janvier 1988 (Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1991), 139-164; *L'Image Médiévale. Naissance et Développements (VI-XV siècles)* (Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1989), 274-277.

<sup>62</sup> Bertold Brecht, "A Revealing Vocabulary," 1937, Werner Hecht, Jan Knopf, et al (eds.), *Bertolt Brecht Werke: Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe, Schriften 2*, vol. 22, 1 (Berlin, Weimar & Frankfurt am Main: Aufbau-Verlag & Suhrkamp Verlag, 1993), 279. Cited in Phoebe von Held and Aura Satz, "This is (Not), My Body:

metamorphosis of the object (or actor) into the real thing, even when it retains part of its previous objecthood – say St. Francis' speaking crucifix returns to wooden imagehood after having spoken and to some extent *become* Christ – could be said to constitute an act of performance that undoes static stability into transformative mobility. Thirteenth-century devotion to the Eucharist represents the precise locus where the sacred and the secular converged.

In effect, the new rhetoric of Medieval imagery appears to continually 'present' and offer incarnate bodily images. If one were to narrativize the development of the image of the crucifix, for example, it might read as follows: once the representation of his human form is admitted onto the cross, Christ appears triumphant, eyes wide open and alive; gradually panel paintings are compressed into the structure of the crucifix, and as the flatness of the painted image tends towards the protrusion of relief (in particular the saintly halo), his body sinks heavily into a death-like suffering, eyes closed and head weary;<sup>63</sup> relief sculptures begin to swell as if on the verge of loosening into liberation; finally the figure on the cross surfaces as three-dimensional, but remains still nailed to the cruciform support. In this morphological sequence a shift is suggested from the planar 'representation' to some sort of substantial 'presentation' of a body, where interestingly the closer to autonomy from the surface, the more tortured, suffering, and bordering on the inanimate is the rendering of the figure of Christ. Paradoxically, and this will prove true time and again in the following chapter, *the Christian image appears more and more lifelike in its lifeless representation of death*.

The impression of near release, emancipation from the frame or pedestal, is echoed throughout the Western/Latin Christian thirteenth century, both in the formulation of new iconographic models and in the corresponding accounts of miracles that permeate the literary florilegia. The rehabilitation of sculpture in the round, as well as the use of light material such as carved wood, allowed for more autonomous and mobile images which tendered themselves for the human grasp. Figures of the Virgin and of Christ, as well as statuary relics, could be taken out in ritual processions or biblical re-enactments, lending themselves to performative roles in which they were not only looked at, but actually embraced, lifted, moved, laid down, clothed and unclothed. The prop-like usability was gradually built into the object. It was not long before the images of the crucified Christ, in a similar manner to the supple bodies of incorrupt dead saints, became even more pliable and detachable (and obedient). This is precisely what

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Brecht's Anti-Religion Revisited," *Always Both Faces*, eds. N. Bryson and A. Renton (London: Slade School of Fine Art, 2000), 94–105, 94.

<sup>63</sup> The most comprehensive studies of Passion iconography, the imagery of the suffering and dead Christ, are Hans Belting's *The Image and its Public in the Middle Ages: Form and Function of Early Paintings of the Passion*, trans. M. Bartusis and R. Meyer (New York: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1990); and James Marrow's *Passion Iconography in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance: A Study of the Transformation of Sacred Metaphor into Descriptive Narrative* (Kortrijk: Van Ghemmert Publishing Company, 1979).

the life-size wooden sculptures of the *depositio Christi* (usually dating from around the early thirteenth century) offer, where Christ's gaping arms suggest a release from the anchored realm of images to the intermingled world of the animate/inanimate. The extreme passivity and acquiescence of this body is reiterated in its rendering of hanging limpness in the stiff wood. Christ's body, suspended between death and the resurrection, *hangs*. His image is at once assimilated into the cross that nails him, and detachable so as to hint at his resurrection and ascension.

The same sense of inherent permissiveness can be found in those later figures of the infant Christ which, incapable of standing without some form of support, seem to offer themselves to the embrace of empathetic women emulating the Virgin.<sup>64</sup> Analogous to the Eucharistic miracles or the *presepio* of Greccio, tender scenes of Christ's childhood highlighted his fleshly incarnational human nature. Caesarius of Heisterbach referred to an image miracle involving the sculptural pair of the Virgin and Infant Jesus. A carpenter during mass saw:

the child get up from his Mother's lap, take the crown off her head, and put it on his own. As if acting out the very words of the doctrine, when they came to the part of the creed *et factus homo* ("and was made man"), the infant returned the crown to his Mother as if he seemed to say 'Mother, as I, through you, am made partaker of human substance, so you through me, are partaker of divine nature.'<sup>65</sup>

But there are other accounts of miracles in which the sculptures, rather than interacting self-referentially, resist or consent to the actions of human beings. In Gerald of Wales' *Gemma Ecclesiae*, written in 1197, we read the tale of some thieves robbing a church: after having despoiled the statue of the Virgin of its jewels and gold, they attempted to take the child sitting on its mother's lap,

But the mother, who had both hands stretched out in front of her (as is customary) closed her right arm around the child and held Him securely. When the thieves saw this... they were astounded and extremely frightened... and returned everything they had stolen. As a sign of this great miracle, the mother embraces the child with her arm closed around Him, even to this day.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup> The independent figure of the Christchild can be traced back to the 1300's, but typifies the 1400's. Cf. U. Schlegel, "The Christchild as Devotional Image in Medieval Italian Sculpture: A contribution to Amrogio Lorenzetti Studies," *The Art Bulletin* 52 (1970): 1-10; C. van Hulst, "La Storia della Devozione a Gesu Bambino nelle Immagini Plastiche Isolate," *Antonianum* 19 (1944): 33-54.

<sup>65</sup> Caesarius of Heisterbach, *The Dialogue on Miracles*, 46, Trans. H.V.E. Scott (London: C.C.S., 1929), 529-30. Cf. also Camille, 222.

<sup>66</sup> Cited in Camille, 236. The will of the image to remain anchored to its place finds many parallels in accounts of relics resisting thefts or translations.

The story corresponds to the new iconographic style that replaced the hieratic Romanesque Throne of Wisdom with the serpentine early Gothic figure of the Mother holding him in her arms or on her hip. Although the new type of image seems to offer a much more exposed infant, no longer enclosed in his Mother's lap and to all appearances autonomous and detachable, this image refuses to become a prop. Increasingly desirable to thieves, Jews or even jealous mothers who were said to have held the Child hostage, this image nonetheless miraculously chooses to remain within the realm of images. The earlier Throne of Wisdom figure had also been involved in animate/inanimate experiences, not as something to be snatched away but, in the words of Ilene Forsyth, as a participating and "presiding presence."<sup>67</sup> From the eleventh century, this image would play its due role in the liturgical dramas enacted by living actors, in particular the *Officium Stellae* performed at the Epiphany to commemorate the Adoration of the Magi.

An example of the docility of an image of the infant Christ can be found in the later writings of the English mystic Margery Kempe (c.1373-c.1440). She tells of a woman she met on her Italian pilgrimage who carried with her in a chest a carved image of the Christchild. On coming to cities, she would take the wooden image and "set it in the laps of respectable wives. And they would dress it up in shirts and kiss it as though it had been God himself."<sup>68</sup> This is yet another example in which the human 'actors' become, like Saint Francis, a living image of the prototype they emulate (in this case the Mother), embodying to perfection the empathetic principle of mimesis or *imitatio*, paramount to the pious sensibility of the time. One of the most influential religious texts of the thirteenth century, the *Meditatio vitae Christi* (falsely attributed to the Franciscan Saint Bonaventure), is a guide to stimulating devotional empathy not only towards Christ but also towards the distressed Mother, thus opening the door to female spirituality.<sup>69</sup> Bonaventure's suggestion that the Poor Clare (his addressee) should imagine herself as Mary's handmaiden is profoundly theatrical:

Kiss the beautiful little feet of the infant Jesus who lies in the manger and beg His mother to offer to let you hold Him a while. Pick him up and hold Him in your arms. Gaze on His face with devotion and reverently kiss Him and delight in Him. You may freely do this... Then

<sup>67</sup> Forsyth, 46. See also Forsyth's article "Magi and Majesty: A Study of Romanesque Sculpture and Liturgical Drama," *Art Bulletin* 50 (1968): 215-22.

<sup>68</sup> *Book of Margery Kempe*, trans. B.A. Windeatt, (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 113. Already earlier, Santa Chiara had repeated Saint Francis's embracing of the Christ child, and was later followed by Saint Agnes, Saint Anthony of Padova, and others. Cf. M. de Marco, *Il Presepe nella Storia e nell'Arte: La Tradizione Natalizia in Puglia*, (Lecce: Edizioni del Grifo, 1992), 20; AAVV *Arte Presepistica*, in "Rassegna Salentina" 2, 1 Lecce (1977), 14-18.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Caroline W. Bynum, "The Female Body and Religious Practise in the Later Middle Ages," *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, vol. 3, 161-219.

return Him to the mother and watch attentively as she cares for Him assiduously and wisely, nursing Him and rendering all services, and remain to help her if you can.<sup>70</sup>

This script is faithfully enacted a century later by Margery Kempe, as in her visions she tenderly holds the Christchild in her hands, and swaddles him with white cloths. This is taken to an extreme in the case of Margarethe Ebner, who attempts to discipline the figure of the Christchild, taking him out of his cradle as he has been “naughty” and kept her awake at night; she then places him on her lap and speaks to him, holds him to her bare breast to suckle him and is shocked to feel “the human touch of his mouth.”<sup>71</sup> Such incarnational aesthetics clearly coincide with the iconographic motif of *ostentatio genitalium* (ostentation of the genitals of Christ), parallel to the canonical *ostentatio vulnerum* (of the wounds), which was prominent between the end of the fourteenth century to past the mid-sixteenth century. God’s incarnation entails the assumption of sexuality, a sexuality delivered from the shame brought about by Adam and Eve. Like Saint Bernard’s milk spurting from the breast of the Virgin, we are again in the domain of the erotic, even more so when Margarethe Ebner places a life-size image of Christ in bed with her and lays him on top of her.<sup>72</sup> Such yearning for bodily contact continues the aesthetics of embraces mentioned earlier, and Margery Kempe herself is explicit in conveying her desire for the image of Christ to free itself from the cross into her arms: “she desired many times that the crucifix should loosen his hands from the cross and embrace her in token of love.”<sup>73</sup>

One might say that regardless of the actual iconography, the images referred to in this chapter function according to the significance of the deposition scene. This crucified body, stilled into its support, hovers between living and dying, it has all the momentous physicality of a corpse and yet it contains within it the certainty of its resurrection. It is not yet stiff but nor is it mobile. It is at once an image of the crucifixion but also its departure from it. This intermingling of the inanimate figure with the live actor, or rather, ‘en-actor,’ implies the co-presence of two pulsations, the one slow and downwardly heavy, the other alive and accelerated, engaged in the lifting, holding, embracing, dressing, undressing, moving, removing and releasing. Such activation of the ‘prop’ opens the path for the theatrical inanimate.



<sup>70</sup> *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript from the Fourteenth Century*, trans. I. Ragusa, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 38-9. “You may freely do this” taps into the implicit sacred profanation of such visualisations.

<sup>71</sup> See Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984).

<sup>72</sup> Cited in Belting, 417.

On a bench, a man costumed like a priest sits alongside his double, both immobile in exactly the same pose. Both appear insentient to the world around them, people uttering a cacophony of memories evoked, forgotten, resurrected. Later, the same priest lies down, dies an undramatic death simply by reclining on his death-bed, as expressionless as ever. Only just discernible, throughout the performance another double is tied beneath the death-bed, face down, as though waiting in the underside for the appropriate reflection in the mirror of reality. Now, with the 'original' resting above, the remaining actors fret as to who the 'real' dead body is, whom they should mourn for. They look at the body underneath, look at the body on the bed, compare, wail, distrust the object of their bereavement which so easily alternates between image and cadaver. He's not real, waste no tears, "turn the crank" of the *trebuchet*.<sup>74</sup> The turntable is rotated, confusion persists...<sup>75</sup> This is the quick-change essential to the relation between animate and inanimate.




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<sup>73</sup> *Book of Margery Kempe*, 48.

<sup>74</sup> As the contraption was called in Medieval theatre, where it was employed to rescue a live actor whose character was condemned to death by replacing him with a scapegoat effigy securely fastened beneath the table. Cf. chapter 2.

<sup>75</sup> Based on a scene in Tadeusz Kantor's play *Wielopole, Wielopole* (1980), videocassette, directed by A. Sapirja, 1984.



*Articulated Crucifixes, Props, Performing Images*  
*Theatrical Enactments, Transubstantiation and Quick-changes*

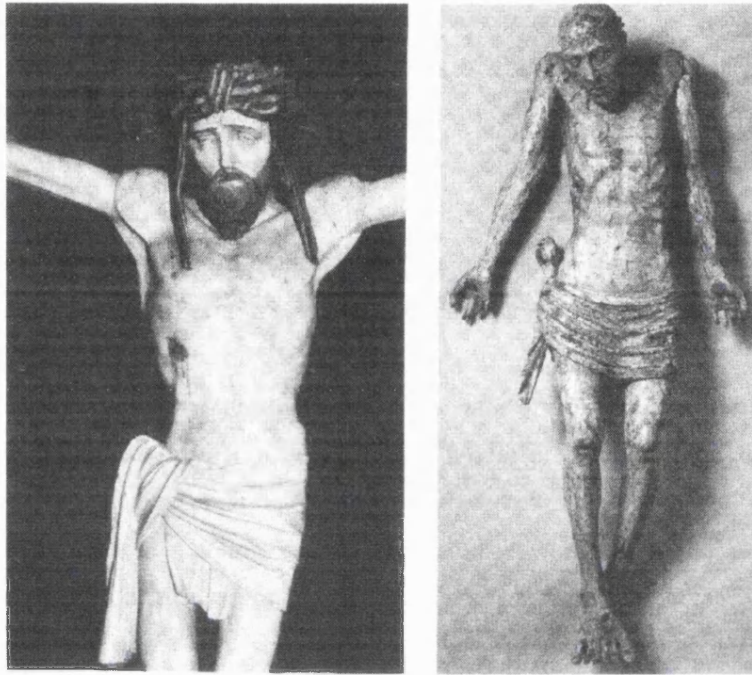
If the image of Christ was not always able to loosen its hands, sculptors facilitated the gesture of descent by making the body of the crucified more supple, rendering the head and arms jointed like the limbs of a puppet. These articulated crucifixes, with arms and legs attached to the torso by means of balls and socket joints, give the image a skeletal quality, a physicality that responds with passive bodily-ness to being moved. This sense of articulation of the image implies a shift from its static looked-at-ness to its use within more interactive and tactile contexts. Indeed it marks a shift toward the image's theatricality, its intermediate status between venerated image and manoeuvrable prop, which will be the focus of this chapter. A choreographic subjection is implied, whereby the vertical configuration of a venerator praying at the feet of the image is now translated into more complex strategies of horizontality, and therefore new patterns of physical contact. Likewise, the sculpture's articulation is matched by the human actor's rigidification. Actors pose as sculptures, hide within sculptures, enact quick-changes with sculptures; confuse the spectator's belief and disbelief with these various modes of performing the object. Such modes of theatricality complicate the alternations of presence and non-presence, subject and object, "transubstantiation" and "non-transubstantiation" (the latter, we shall see, a favoured strategy of protestant iconoclasts). The split-vision and willing suspension of disbelief which characterise theatrical enactment are here examined in their pre-modern form, thus paving the way for the remaining chapters.

The earliest account of a crucifix with moveable arms comes from the convent of Benedictine nuns in Barking in Essex, dating from 1370. These life-size crucifixes served mainly liturgical purposes, their arms unlocking for the *Deposito*, the moment when, after being carried around in procession during Easter Good Friday, the image of Christ was taken down from the cross, wrapped in a shroud and placed in or on the altar serving the Holy Sepulchre, until on Easter Sunday the shroud was unwound and Christ would rise from his grave, the *Elevatio*.<sup>1</sup> The inanimated-ness of the articulated sculpture is coherent with the limplimbedness of a cadaver,

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<sup>1</sup> See Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933); N.C. Brooks, *The Sepulchre of Christ in Art and Literature* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1921); G. Taubert and J. Taubert, "Mittelalterliche Kruzifixe mit schwenkbaren Armen: Ein Beitrag zur Verwendug von bildwerken in der Liturgie," *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Vereins für Kunstwissenschaft* 23 (1969): 79-121; Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, 286.

reiterating the accusation of many an iconoclast that the image is mere dead matter, although here it would appear to reaffirm a coherency between subject of representation and material of representation. As we have seen earlier, *the image appears more alive and lifelike in its capacity to mimic the moment of death and of dying*, than when it blatantly attempts to emulate life.



7. Articulated crucifixes from Sankt an der Glan (left) and Grancia in Tessin (right), early 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Images became ever more crucial in liturgical enactments, and often living human actors and inert wooden sculptures would seamlessly interact, join, interchange and even replace one another. For this purpose the image develops a sort of ergonomic user-friendliness, as it were, an intrinsic instrumentality making parts of the figure articulate, detachable or equipped with puppet-like steering mechanisms. In the above-mentioned scene of the *Depositio*, Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, and an attendant would have been engaged in releasing the wooden figure from the cross, and a man acting as the Virgin Mary would receive the dead body on her lap. Whilst the former take the image on a trajectory downwards, the latter upholds it from total horizontality.

At this point it seems pertinent to digress into the initial stages of Christian theatre, which, like sculpture, had been abandoned for almost a millennium. For early Christians, theatre had been too reminiscent of paganism, and was condemned from Tertullian and Augustine onwards as immoral impersonation, false and illusory slavish mimicry.<sup>2</sup> It is revealing that the first major landmark to contribute towards the birth of Christian theatre is presumed to be the dialogue

<sup>2</sup> See Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1981), especially chapter "Roman Ruins" on early Christian antitheatricity, 38-65.

sung at the beginning of Easter Day Mass in the Benedictine monasteries (tracing back to *ca.* 933), known from its opening words as the *Quem queritis?* trope.<sup>3</sup> Part of the choir (representing angels) would sing “Whom do you seek in the Tomb, O Christians?” to which the second half would respond “Jesus of Nazareth, O heavenly ones”, then the whole choir would sing the joyful tidings of the Resurrection. It is almost uncanny that this formative moment of representation in the flesh should touch so poignantly upon *the request for a corpse and the assertion of its resurrected life*. It is as though the re-introduction of theatre in the West implied re-enactment in the sense of resurrection, bringing back the dead. The concurrent developments of the relic and the incorrupt cadaver support this understanding of medieval theatre. In fact, most of the twelfth- and thirteenth-century dramatizations, the Latin liturgical plays that gradually followed from this early dialogue, had as their principal subject matter the events surrounding the Resurrection, and the Nativity that made the Resurrection possible. These two moments in the life of Christ, as we have seen with regard to images and relics, brought to the forefront his two natures, human and divine, visible and invisible, and from the moment of representation implied a prevalence of his tangibility, imitability and humanness. This rise in theatrical representation can be seen as the ultimate climax of incarnational aesthetics.<sup>4</sup> Later vernacular drama, usually associated with the feast of the Corpus Christi, focussed instead on the institution of the Eucharist and on the brutal facts of the Crucifixion that followed. Medieval biblical drama, rejected by the Eastern Church as too flagrantly incarnate and representational, can therefore be considered a feature exclusive to the Western Church. Such theatrical forms of representation thrived specifically with, and perhaps even because of, the feast of the Corpus Christi, which involved the parading of the Eucharist, the ‘real’ fleshly presence. One of the oldest surviving manuscripts of a Corpus Christi play originates from Orvieto and focuses on the miracle of a bleeding Host taking place before a disbelieving German priest.<sup>5</sup> Once again, it is the miraculous evidence of life within the inanimate that determines the course of devotion. Here the *mise-en-à-bîme* of the theatricalised conversion is echoed in the reconfirmation of the faith of the spectator, and, similarly, the transubstantiation of the Host echoes the transubstantiation effect which prevails in Western European theatre.

If earlier we referred to the image being roused to a series of vitalizing human gestures, with the nascent forms of theatre we encounter an inverse process by which actors have a propensity towards the still image. In due course the Corpus Christi processions combined

<sup>3</sup> This phrase is originally not in the gospel account of the resurrection but rather in the narrative of Jesus’ arrest (*John* 18:5-7). For the earliest known version of *Quem quaeritis?* see the text in D. Bevington, *Medieval Drama* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975), 25; cf. L.R. Muir, *The Biblical Drama of Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 13. More generally on the *Quem Queritis* see Michal Kobińska, *This is My Body: Representational Practices in the Early Middle Ages* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Such is view adopted by Gail M. Gibson, *The Theatre of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

real drama, actors in posed biblical *tableaux vivants* and life-size polychrome figures.<sup>6</sup> The tableaux would have been mute and immobile, according to the testimony of the Duke of Bedford, who wrote in 1424 that the actor's attitudes were "without speech or gesture, just as if the [actors] were images upon a wall."<sup>7</sup> One can imagine this hieratic distillation literally "fleshing out" into dramatic sequences. The movement from frozen tableau to speaking and gesticulating actor is fully analogous to the quickening of an inert figure. Similarly, human actors crystallizing into a fossil-like image, hardening to stillness as though dead, evoke those sleeping incorrupt cadavers or tomb sculptures referred to earlier. It seems apropos that in his study of tableaux vivants, Kernodle should elucidate their changing patterns by referring to architectural examples of medieval altars and tombs.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, it is as stilled movement that the tableau is wheeled from station to station during the slow procession, as a dead body requiring transport.<sup>9</sup> This parallels another puppet-like and movable figure, the *Palmesel*, the near life-size wooden sculpture of Christ sitting on an ass, cynically described by later iconoclasts as a "wooden ass on a trolley" with an image of God on it.<sup>10</sup> Dating back to the tenth century and flourishing particularly in Germany, the ceremonial custom entailed the figure being dragged or rather wheeled into the church on Palm Sunday.<sup>11</sup> The still image is animated through being passively hauled.

The symmetry of this reciprocal mimesis might explain in part the interchangeability of image and actor, though this merely clarifies the technical procedures and not the motivations behind them. What might appear at first a dangerously complex dilemma – the relationship of image to prototype – is to a certain extent resolved in the familiar assertion that medieval re-enactments of the bible were aimed at stimulating the memory and empathetic compassion of the spectator, not truly representing God in the flesh. The rebirth of Western drama is often explained (alongside the emerging representational realism of the arts) as the climactic outcome of the affective piety and desire for re-actualization that characterizes the later Middle Ages. But what exactly would be the relationship of the live actor to his prototype, his original, his role? It is hard to ascertain as medieval acting techniques remain elusive to us, often imagined as either stylised, archaic, wooden (pun intended) and perhaps even Brechtian,

<sup>5</sup> Muir, 22-23.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Mervyn James, "Ritual, Drama and Social Body in the Late Medieval English Town," *Past and Present* 98 (1983): 3-29.

<sup>7</sup> Cited in Alan H. Nelson, *The Medieval English Stage: Corpus Christi Pageants and Plays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 35.

<sup>8</sup> G. R. Kernodle, *From Art to Theatre: Form and Convention in the Renaissance* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 53-58. Although his study focuses mainly on Renaissance street theatre, it also surveys earlier Medieval expressions of theatre and its relation to art.

<sup>9</sup> On the thirteenth-century revival of royal funeral processions and wax figures and their continuity in history, see Carlo Ginzburg, "Représentation: le Mot, l'Idée, la Chose," *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 46, 6 (1991): 1219-34. Interestingly, Ginzburg relates this practice of effigy-making to the dogma of the transubstantiation.

<sup>10</sup> Cited in Michael Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), 58.

<sup>11</sup> Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, vol. 1, 94-98.

thus distancing the actor from his original, or indeed Stanislavskian, enacting a transubstantiation of actor into role.<sup>12</sup> In Medieval drama one suspects that the spectators were never truly duped into believing Christ was the actor playing him, but at the same time, a sense of faith prevailed which enabled a two-tiered reading of the representations. Liturgical and theatrical enactments are different in that in the one the actors ritually transubstantiate into their roles, whereas in the latter a more distanced un-transubstantiated theatricality is enacted.<sup>13</sup> All the same, I would argue that the effect of transubstantiation referred to earlier is always present to some degree in theatrical representation, even when the strategies of alienation attempt to rebel against it. Presence of some sort or another is suggested through the mediating body or object on stage.

For the late Byzantines (1204-1453), the vision of the transubstantiated object was far too literal. Symeon of Thessalonica was appalled by the Latin imagery he designated as heretical: "For instead of painted garments and hair, they adorn them [images] with human hair and clothes, which is not an image of hair and of a garment, but the [actual] hair and garment of a man, and hence it is not an image and a symbol of the prototype."<sup>14</sup> Symeon goes on to condemn the Western custom of staging Mystery Plays with biblical subjects, for again they lack a representational mediation, a veil of some sort to distance the content from its form. These objects of transformations were too close to the thing they transformed into. Underlying these criticisms there seems to be a refutation of the substance of the corpo-real presentation, which is not *representational* enough. The hypostatic icon implied a disjunction, that is to say an emanation from the prototype to its representation. What the new Latin imagery formulated was a compression and concurrence of the two, mainly in terms of the matter employed. As in the theatre, flesh could be represented by flesh, and the body's accessories by those very same objects, all in a confusing combination of *real* and *image*. This mode of presentation becomes particularly apparent in the late fifteenth-century and early Renaissance *Sacri Monti*, where polychromed sculptures staged in tableaux vivants of the biblical scenes of the cavalry used real hair, glass eyes, real clothes, etc.,<sup>15</sup> setting the tone for later wax and fleshly tableaux (discussed in chapters 4 and 5).

<sup>12</sup> Martin Stevens aligns Medieval drama with Brechtian alienation in his article "Illusion and Reality in the Medieval Drama," *College English* 32 (1970): 448-64; whereas John R. Elliot takes more of a Stanislavskian slant in "Medieval Acting," *Contexts for Early English Drama*, eds. M.G. Briscoe and J.C. Coldewey (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 238-52. According to the latter, the more incarnate, human roles allowed for a bit more psychological depth than the divine or diabolical roles, which had to be somehow removed and distant.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Glynne Wickham, "Drama and Religion in the Middle Ages," *Shakespeare's Dramatic Heritage* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1969) 3-23, who distinguishes between "the drama of the Real Presence within liturgy and the imitative drama of Christ's Humanity in the world outside."

<sup>14</sup> Symeon of Thessalonica, *Contra haereses* 23 (PG 155, 112). Trans. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire*, 254.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. George Kubler, "Sacred Mountains in Europe and America," *Christianity and the Renaissance: Image and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento*, eds. T. Verdon and J. Henderson (Syracuse, 1990), 413-41; Mitchell B. Merback, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel: Pain and Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 41-8.

The ambiguity between miracles and representation of miracles is apparent in the following description by a Byzantine writer of the Florentine celebration of the feast of John the Baptist, the city's patron saint, witnessed in 1439:

there is a big procession and a celebration in which the whole population takes part and during which they perform prodigies and almost miracles, or representations of miracles. For they resuscitate the dead... they crucify a man, like Christ; and they perform the Resurrection of Christ... Moreover they have a procession with statues and relics of saints and effigies and precious crosses...<sup>16</sup>

Statues, relics, crucified men “like Christ,” resuscitations of the dead, performances of the Resurrection of Christ, all coexist, oscillating between prodigies, “almost” miracles and representations of miracles. Perhaps this is most evident in the enactments of *tableaux vivants*, where the figures are certainly not ‘acting’ in the traditional sense, but rather posing, *pausing*, decelerating as image. (The later practice of secular *tableaux vivants* will be discussed at length in the next chapter.) Here the living body *becomes* the statue with the very same ambiguity and polysemy that the lifeless articulated sculpture of Christ is his corpse. Both inhabit the pause between animation and de-animation.

The very notion of the miraculous shifts with the theatrical impulse. Whereas earlier we looked at “original” image miracles, the theatrical re-enactment aims to replicate the original event, and, in the more liturgical enactments, *re-actualise* the miracle. The cultic function of the Mass was to induce a re-experiencing of the Nativity, the Passion, the Death and Resurrection of Christ in the present time. Theatrical re-enactments served a predominantly mnemonic function of instruction, which inevitably, for some viewers, as the above quote illustrates, might have slipped into actualisation. Belief and disbelief were elaborately orchestrated through stagecraft so as to evoke, represent and present, thus conjuring illusions and realities which the viewer might relive whilst also remaining aware of the simulation.

The intricacy can become somewhat thorny when in addition to human actors there are sculptural doubles (of the human and/or of the divine?) and human actors doubling the sculptures, all of which alternate, like the statue of Sainte Foy studied earlier, between containing, being and depicting. In a play performed in Arras around the year 1200, Jean Bodel's *Jeu de Saint Nicolas*, an icon, an actor feigning to be a statue and live actors all interact on the same stage “crossing the boundary between lifelikeness and life itself.”<sup>17</sup> Ironically, the

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<sup>16</sup> Peter Meredith and John E. Tailby, *The Staging of Religious Drama in Europe in the Later Middle Ages: Texts and Documents in English Translation*, trans. R. Ferrari, Meredith et al. (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1983), 240.

<sup>17</sup> Camille, 131. On plays themed around Saint Nicholas and an image, see Young, 337-351.

play deals with the subject of idolatry versus true worship, the idol of the Saracens and the icon of Saint Nicholas. It is intriguing that whilst the idol appears to come to life by virtue of a complex theatrical artifice, the true icon of the saint (a statuette) does not move nor speak, and at the moment of the saint's intervention, is cautiously doubled on stage by a live actor, acting as its presumed prototype. In the play a Christian image venerator must prove the efficacy of his image of Saint Nicholas, and to do so it must protect the treasure of the Saracen king, or the Christian will lose his life. At night, one of the malevolent characters states: "No one's left on guard at all except a singled 'horned Mohomet,' quite dead, he doesn't move a muscle,"<sup>18</sup> and thus the treasure is stolen from underneath the statue. Saint Nicholas the prototype then appears to the sleeping thieves and orders them to return the treasure, which, terrified, they do. Finally the Saracen king is converted and the idol Tervegan speaks some gibberish that the King translates as "he's dying of grief and anger, because I renounced him and turned to God."<sup>19</sup> The idol is animated in speaking its own death. Now hollowed of its actor, leaving behind only a shell, the idol is iconoclastically broken: "Down! Curse you if you're ever raised! You're empty as a bladder of wind!"<sup>20</sup> Hollow, cursed into horizontal irresurrectability, Tervegan is shattered in iconoclastic fury. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this quick-change act is that the statue must be hollow in order for it to be destroyed, the live actor must emerge unscathed, and the image must reveal its inanimated-ness, the insentient deadness which idols were constantly accused of in the bible.

This is a crucial and difficult area which sheds new light on the image as *scapegoat*, not only in theatrical enactment but also in relation to certain acts of iconoclasm. *The cadaverous propensity of the image lends itself to function as a surrogate body on which to inflict violence.* It thus reiterates the lifelessness of the human body as much as of the image of the body. The medieval "Theatre of Cruelty," as Jody Enders has designated it in homage to Antonin Artaud,<sup>21</sup> focussed primarily on the tortured body, structuring empathy around the suffering of the human incarnate Christ. Medieval drama thus used the rhetorical strategy of torture for the production of Christian truth, representing and indeed echoing the dramatic deaths of the earlier Christian martyrs. Many medieval plays employed dummies or sculptural doubles of living actors for those moments of saintly martyrdom, and it was perhaps also this double forgery that angered anti-theatrical opponents. Medieval stagecraft and special effects were rather complex and cunning, full of disappearance and reappearance acts, trapdoors, hiding

<sup>18</sup> Jean Bodel, "Le Jeu de Saint Nicolas," trans. R. Axton and J. Stevens, *Medieval French Plays* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 71-136, 97. 'Mahomet' was one of the terms employed to designate an idol, thus ironically orientalizing idolatry in relation to Islam, the most aniconic of religions. Cf. Camille, Scott.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* I am adhering to Camille's hypothesis of an actor inhabiting a gilded body mask (Camille, 129-135).

<sup>21</sup> Jody Enders, *The Medieval Theatre of Torture: Rhetoric, Memory, Violence* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999). See also John Spalding Gattton, "'There Must Be Blood': Mutilation and Martyrdom on the Medieval Stage," *Violence in Drama*, ed. J. Redmond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 79-92; Michael

places, swap mechanisms. In a document listing the theatrical effects from Bourges, 1536, we read of a “dummy corpse full of bones and entrails” standing in for St. Barnabas, bound to a cartwheel and burnt; likewise “a nude or a body” for the scene of the flaying St. Bartholomew, replacing the live actor thanks to a secretly revolving table.<sup>22</sup> But even more disturbing are those later examples of artists employed to make painted or sculpted dummies not only with internal flesh and entrails, but also covered externally with pigskin, made to appear flogged and wounded.<sup>23</sup> Similar to the shaped reliquary in that they functioned as a container for body parts; dissimilar in that these perishable props were constructed precisely with their re-enacted dismemberment in mind (as opposed to the restoration of integrity). Dummies were required predominantly for scenes of extreme torture and execution, to be beheaded, flogged, flayed, torn apart and violated, all the while retaining an expression of “calm”<sup>24</sup> and serenity, as the original saints would have done to defy their fragmentation and emphasize their integrity. They could be segmented like the cutting of a cadaver into relics, only without the preservation. For were the real actors to re-enact martyrdom this would no longer be theatre, but some other domain. As Jonas Barish writes in relation to Roman theatre, “The dismembered captive, the stricken gladiator, the incinerated actor cannot rise up to repeat their performances again on the following day.”<sup>25</sup> *Resurrectability is an essential feature of theatre*; only the image, the prop-object, can truly die. Whereas the icon survived for and through its prototype, as a living presence in the place of absence, here the image is an excess which can be discarded, dying rather than living for the prototype.

This image-prop now appears invested with new meaning. If earlier in chapter 1 we referred to a justification of the use of images in that they present what is absent, here the image comes in precisely to enact the *death of presence*, an evaporation into absence. The image does not replace the dead body so much as the *dying* body. This in-between state of living-towards-dying requires an articulated body, one which can effectively respond to violence by echoing each blow throughout its limbs, a construction which knows how to break, where to break so as to evoke the vulnerability of flesh, not the insentience of solid wood or any other sculptural material. Bodily dismemberment, from the examples set by the first Christian saints (and earlier by Roman spectacles), is highly theatrical. Disturbingly, the dismembered body's unspeakability lends itself to visualisation. One only has to recall the excruciating scene in Peter Greenaway's film *The Baby of Macon*, in which the child's body is ostentatiously

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O'Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theatre in Early-Modern England* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), particularly chapter “God's Body and Incarnational Drama,” 63-88; Merback..

<sup>22</sup> Meredith and Tailby, *The Staging of Religious Drama*, 102; see also William Tydeman, *The Theatre of the Middle Ages: Western European Staging Conditions, c. 800-1576* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), chapter “Resources and Effects,” 176-178.

<sup>23</sup> From the artist's contract regarding a play on the Antichrist, Modane, 1580. Meredith and Tailby, 105.

<sup>24</sup> Thus in the Majorca codex, a late sixteenth-century edition, although the plays are believed to be considerably earlier, the dummies of SS. Crispin and Crispinian are beheaded “and the heads are to be made with masks with calm expressions.” *Ibid.*, 110.



fragmented into relics, or indeed the Renaissance theatres of anatomy (of which more later), where the body's dissection was very much a public spectacle. Similarly, torture is "built on these repeated acts of display and having as its purpose the production of a fantastic illusion of power, torture is a grotesque piece of compensatory drama."<sup>26</sup> This threat to the body's integrity is one that performance re-enacts with delight, and represents the crucial point at which the animate and the inanimate interact, merge seamlessly into one another, as though the fragmented body's imminent objecthood were echoed in the use of scapegoat props that stand in for it. Marjorie Garber observes:

The materiality of the body and its vulnerable articulations not only exemplifies but constitutes the semantics of performance. Dismemberment is the hard connective tissue of drama, the skeleton beneath its scrim. Bodily pathos (and for that matter, bodily levity, too) manifested through the eloquent syntax of the jointed body has been the spectacular and articulate engine of theatre since the *sparagmos* of Pentheus in Euripides' *Bacchae*, since the piecemeal excavations of a gravedigger in the *Hamlet* churchyard, since the cozened Horse-courser pulled the leg of Doctor Faustus – and the leg came off.<sup>27</sup>

Such jointed disjunction is the very point of intersection between what is animate and what is not, or what won't be any longer. (I will examine this in relation to prostheses in chapter 5.) Undoubtedly, the prosthetic nature of special effects in theatre (or cinema, for that matter) heightens this sacrificial nature of inanimate objects. As Elaine Scarry elegantly writes: "it is part of the work of creating to *deprive the external world of the privilege of being inanimate* – of, in other words, its privilege of being irresponsible to its sentient inhabitants on the basis that it is itself nonsentient."<sup>28</sup> The scapegoating of the image here appears to function as an inscription into the image of an awareness of pain. Whether the spectator was aware of this scapegoating of the image is another matter, and most evidence points to increasingly complex strategies of illusion to make the spectator truly believe the actor was being tortured to death or dismembered, just as it was important that Jesus truly appeared to be flogged, and then, on the cross, speared, or to disappear from the tomb and ascend. As Gustave Cohen speculates in his discussion of execution and torture scenes, the switch between animate and inanimate demanded deceptive illusion so as to avoid *disillusion*:

At the moment of the execution, their habitual method is to replace the actor with his *feinte*, that is, with his fake image or by a simple dummy destined to represent him and upon whom the grimacing executioner, who is the damned soul of the mystery play, lets loose with all the

<sup>25</sup> Barish, 48.

<sup>26</sup> Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 28.

<sup>27</sup> Marjorie Garber, "Out of Joint," *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, eds. D. Hillman and C. Mazzio (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 23-51, 45. Garber's comment is a response to Paul de Mann's reading of the Kleist essay, cf. chapter 5.

cruelties these tortuous ages could invent as they further upped the ante of the real torments which martyrs had endured. One can readily imagine that these substitutions demanded great technical skill, so that the spectator might not be too disillusioned, the spectator in whom the exposure of fiction would have forestalled the desired emotional response.<sup>29</sup>

An even greater violence could be inflicted on the insentient dummy, perhaps even exceeding that of the original sentient martyrs. Cruelty could dilate on the inanimate, whereas mostly it would have abated on the animate actors. Nonetheless, the interplay between image, reality and theatrical illusion observed of the *Jeu de Saint Nicolas* is one that becomes increasingly intricate and hard to pry apart. For there were also occasions in which for example the actual decapitated body was that of a convicted criminal, or an actor passed out and almost died in being crucified in the role of Christ,<sup>30</sup> thus perilously blurring the distinctions between props and actors.

In his response to a letter from Lou Andreas Salome, Rainer Maria Rilke writes of the “unification of the puppet with the corporeal and its most horrible fates.”<sup>31</sup> Its material undoing stands in for the dead and dying body, or, as Rainer Nägele notes in relation to Rilke’s essay and *Trauerspiel*, “to avoid death and taboo, we need the puppet.”<sup>32</sup> Rilke concludes his prose piece by writing “we did not make an idol of you... because we were not thinking of you at all,”<sup>33</sup> thus to some extent mitigating the final scene of the doll’s iconoclastic destruction: “look, look, all the woebegone moths are fluttering out of you... they were, after all maggots which ate you away.”<sup>34</sup> Accusations of idolatry and acts of iconoclasm thrive on the material undoing of the object, the revelation that the thing has in fact *not* transubstantiated, but remained crudely the stuff, indeed the *stuffing*, inanimate matter. Impenetrably insentient yet frangible.



It is not surprising that at the acme of incarnational aesthetics, iconoclasm should rear its head once again, this time in the West, and with the additional enemy of theatrical representation.

<sup>28</sup> Scarry, 285.

<sup>29</sup> Gustave Cohen, *Histoire de la Mise en Scène dans le Théâtre Religieux Français du Moyen Age* (Paris: Champion, 1951), 149. Trans. Enders, 200.

<sup>30</sup> Enders, 192-218. This also reflects on the low social status of actors at the time.

<sup>31</sup> Cited in Rainer Nägele, “Puppet Play and *Trauerspiel*,” *Theatre, Theory, Speculation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1991), 1-27, 24. A fragment of Rilke’s (not included in *Duino Elegies*) provides a clear equation between the doll and the cadaver: “If there is a dead body in the room – cover it, that it does not become the gruesome doll... that he does not play with it...” Cited in Eva-Maria Simms’s “Uncanny Dolls: Images of Death in Rilke and Freud,” *New Literary History* 27, 4 (1996): 663-678, 665.

<sup>32</sup> Nägele, 19.

<sup>33</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, “Some Reflections on Dolls,” *Rodin and Other Prose Pieces*, trans. C.G. Houston (London: Quartet Books, 1986), 119-27, 123.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

Already in 1207 the enactment of the biblical plays had been partially inhibited by Pope Innocent III, which explains why 15 years later Saint Francis required the successor's permission to perform the *presepe* ceremony in Greccio. About a year later in 1224, Roberte Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln, was offended by such theatricality and officially condemned miracle plays, which had apparently been produced under the auspices of the clergy.<sup>35</sup> In fifteenth-century England, the Lollards attacked the use of images and the practice of theatre, but were still considered heretical in their time. It was only in 1522, with an outburst starting in Wittenberg, followed shortly after by attacks in Zurich, that the varying degrees of iconoclasm of the Reformation swept over Northern Europe and gradually destabilized Catholicism. In the rising conflict between word and image, logocentrism was partly facilitated by the birth and dissemination of the printing press, and certain factions of the Reformation would condemn representational practises, including art and theatre, as blatant idolatry. Whereas images were thought of as inappropriately dead and inert, theatre was perhaps all too alive and fleshly (or not dead enough?). As the author of the principle Lollard document, *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*, had written earlier in a sarcastic affiliation of drama and the visual arts, painting is a "dead book" and theatre a "quick book."<sup>36</sup> The difference appears to be merely a question of rhythm or animatedness, but both were examples of impiety. Indeed, theatre was condemned as idolatrous not because of the worship it implied (for clearly no-one actually mistook an actor for God) as much as for the sacrilege it performed and because it appealed to the eye,<sup>37</sup> to the senses, and was furthermore associated with sordid sexuality. Spirituality could find its best alcove in the book, the word, not on the stage. However, once again it is predominantly the image that serves a scapegoat function, being perhaps the only material thing that could be physically attacked without resorting to murder.<sup>38</sup> One writer has the images themselves complain of their persecution in a broadsheet printed in Nuremberg during the outburst of iconoclasm (around 1530):

We poor mean church images  
 And corner idols big and small  
 Admit our misdeeds  
 Which have enraged God and the World...  
 You yourselves started this with us,  
 Who are lifeless  
 And yet now must bear  
 The blame and punishment for others.  
 That is surely an unjust reward,

<sup>35</sup> C. Davidson, *Drama and Art: An Introduction to the Use of Evidence from the Visual Arts for the Study of Early Drama* (Michigan: The Medieval Institute, 1977), 9.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>37</sup> See O'Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye*.

That is surely an unjust reward,  
 You yourselves made us into idols  
 And now you deride us for it...<sup>39</sup>

And images could do little to save themselves this time. Similar to Byzantine iconoclasm, the decades preceding Reformation abounded in reports of miracles, but, as the more tolerant Erasmus wrote in describing the destruction of images in Nuremberg, not without some discomfort and perhaps even compassion: "curiously, no miracles now happened, whereas earlier they had occurred when much lesser indignities were inflicted on the holy objects."<sup>40</sup> For many Protestants, faith, not supernatural intervention, was the primary component of sanctity. Interestingly, the iconoclasm of the Reformation not only eyed images with suspicion, accusing image-worshippers of either child-like naivety, idolatry, or indeed corruption (in particular the function of images as indulgences buying the believers way to heaven)<sup>41</sup> but, unlike early iconoclasm, relics too were ridiculed as absurdly self-replicating beyond the original from which they had been fragmented. Using arithmetical logic, the iconophobe John Calvin derided the relics of the true cross, writing "If, as the Gospel testifies, this cross could be carried by one man, how glaring is the audacity which now pretends to display more relics than three hundred men could bear!"<sup>42</sup> The image that contained part of its prototype, that had any intercessionary relation to it, was flattened into its material inadequacy. The very possibility of intercession, not only through images, but through the saints and their relics, was challenged by the Reformers, for only Christ could be a mediator. *The strings were being cut*, there could be no communication between the original and its incarnation in object, no more sacred puppetry, so to speak. Images which had been previously used in theatrical devotional rituals such as processions were attacked with particular vehemence, as if to undo any possibility of movement. An example to the point is the abovementioned figure of the *Palmesel*, which throughout 1523-31 was reportedly burned, derided, thrown into the water, according to accounts from across Switzerland and southern Germany.<sup>43</sup> Protestantism deliberately attempted to sieve out the supernatural efficacy of objects, to curtail the theatricality of church rituals and decorations, and to depreciate the miracle-working aspects of religion,<sup>44</sup> even though undoubtedly the miraculous survived in protestant culture.<sup>45</sup> But the

<sup>38</sup> As Sergiusz Michalski writes, such attacks on images were often substitutes for "a direct physical attack on the representatives of Catholicism." *The Reformation and the Visual Arts: The Protestant Image Question in Western and Eastern Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) 90.

<sup>39</sup> Erhard Schoen, "Complaint of the Persecuted Images." Cited in Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors*, 78-80.

<sup>40</sup> Erasmus of Rotterdam, letter to Willibald Pirckheimer, 9 May 1529. Trans. in Belting, "Appendix," 547.

<sup>41</sup> The position of the Reformation on images was not uniform, and some factions were more tolerant than others. For a study of these subtle distinctions, and, most valuably, the effect of the Reformation on the Eastern Church, see Michalski.

<sup>42</sup> Cited in Bentley, *Restless Bones*, 173, cf. chapter "Relics Survive the Reformation," 169-194.

<sup>43</sup> Michalski, 92.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London: Penguin, 1973); Victoria Nelson, *The Secret Life of Puppets* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2002). Nelson argues that Protestant rationality forced the shadows of religious belief to hide in forms of art

very tendency of images toward a newfound theatricality, as outlined in the previous chapter, meant that the objects of the Reformer's attacks had developed into increasingly (and I hesitate to use the word) 'illusionistic' puppets, containing a complex inside which enabled a performative response to the living. All the more to reveal in its destruction.

The same fingering gesture of the Doubting Thomas in Christ's wound so as to substantiate his belief can also function to opposite effect. Although this physical invasion of touching the sacramental body of Christ was one that was constantly ostensified to corroborate belief, shown and displayed throughout the feast of the Corpus Christi and other medieval dramas, this meeting point of the sacred and the secular lends another aspect to such ostensification, described by Bakhtin as a "comic operation of dismemberment," enabling one to "finger it familiarly on all sides, turn it upside down, inside out, peer at it from above and below, break open its external shell, look into its centre, doubt it, take it apart."<sup>46</sup> Such lack of inhibition in the touching demystifies, even humiliates, perhaps, and can easily turn humorous. But such a dismemberment undoubtedly functions first and foremost as an act of iconoclasm, revealing the inside of the 'thing' in all its inglorious object-hood. Whereas relic atomisation entailed a mode of disseminating belief, fragmenting the dead body so as to share it expansively throughout the terrains of Christianity, iconoclasm undertakes a reverse process whereby the shredded object loses all efficacy and is totally disempowered. The dead image's death is reiterated, reconfirmed, re-enacted. Like the dismembering of a theatrical prop, *it is not resurrectible*.

Thus, the statues or crucifixes that would *not* bleed were confirmed by early iconoclasts such as the Lollards as dead and insentient. They were frequently burnt, for in a tautological triumph, dead images had no blood, felt no pain. One Lollard incident describes the chopping off of the head of a statue of St. Catherine to see whether she would bleed. As she didn't, she was burnt as a sham.<sup>47</sup> The statue evinced no signs of life, it did not *become* its prototype, and could not prove itself against the iconoclasts. In 1529, a Basle iconoclast shouted as he threw a crucifix on to the fire "If you are God defend yourself, if you are human bleed."<sup>48</sup> Instead of blood the image simply revealed the wood or stone of which it was made. It comes as little

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and entertainment which could provide an outlet for suppressed irrationality, so that the heirs of the 'idol' are now to be found in their demonised form in the science fiction novel, the genres of horror and pulp, films, comics, and other illustrations of the supernatural grotesque. Cf. chapter 5 on the uncanny.

<sup>45</sup> Luther's image was itself subject to a form of cultic devotion not dissimilar to that of the medieval saints, with reports of his image weeping or preserved from fire. Likewise, whilst miracles were being condemned as diabolical magic, reports of prodigies (strange births, astral phenomena, meteorological events) multiplied prolifically in the decades after 1550.

<sup>46</sup> Sarah Beckwith quoting Mikhail Bakhtin in "Ritual, Church and Theatre: Medieval Dramas of the Sacramental Body," *Culture and History 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writings*, ed. D. Aers (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1992), 65-89, 66.

<sup>47</sup> Margaret Aston, *Lollard and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1984), 135-192, 168.

<sup>48</sup> Michalski, 78.

surprise that John Wyclif, the principle writer behind Lollardy, was against the theologies of transubstantiation, as were other mainline Protestants of the sixteenth century such as Zwingli and Calvin (and certain factions of the Church of England). The Lutheran wing of the Reformation developed the alternative notion of the *consubstantiation* of the Eucharist, in opposition to the doctrine of the transubstantiation, which asserted that the substance of the bread and wine remains unchanged, the body and blood of Christ coexisting “in, with, and under” the substance of bread and wine.<sup>49</sup> The object never metamorphosed into something else, or if it did, it retained its previous nature and coexisted with it.

Indeed, if one delves deeper into the phenomenon of iconoclasm, a certain neutralisation takes place though the damage to a polished statue, revealing rough stone, laying bare a shocking glimpse into the sculpture’s crude ‘viscera,’ as it were, or at least into its frame. One obviously gains some further understanding of the object’s material consistence, which to some extent is thought to, or hoped to, neutralise any invested belief.<sup>50</sup> But why does one level of understanding come at the price of another; in other words, why does the experience of brute physicality overshadow any insight into the object’s properties as an object of faith? This physical invasion appears once more to constitute the locus of conversion, although this time towards *disbelief*, not belief. This becomes even more marked when the exposure reveals more than mere stone, when instead the invasion offers the side view of an intricate anatomy, a new layer of imagery that seems to reaffirm the fear of some kind of homunculus inhabiting or operating the object, whilst safely killing it off. The iconoclastic act reveals an aspect of rawness of the object, exposes its reducible materiality, very literally *breaks its mechanism, cuts its strings*. This becomes even more apparent in the specific instances of iconoclasm aimed at animated images such as automata, puppets, and other similar images containing an ‘inside.’

There is a sense in which objects of faith appear to be encased in an aura of finitude. They are ‘finished’ and cannot be retouched, corrected or even imply such a condition of openness; they can only be carefully restored under the proper sanctions. Their sacred status is partly reliant on being conclusively polished, canonized both in form and meaning. An apt example is the legendary *acheiropoietai* icon of the Virgin painted by St. Luke. True to the meaning of the term *acheiropoietai*, i.e. “not made by human hands,” this icon was started by St. Luke, but miraculously finished itself. The miracle lies in the act of conclusion performed by the agent

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<sup>49</sup> The Roman Catholic response to the Protestant denial of the transubstantiation was to affirm it “afresh” in 1551 at the Council of Trent, in accordance with the eucharistic theology of a renewed Scholasticism. As I hope is clear by now, my use of the term *transubstantiation* is as a metaphor sourced from the domain of theology applied to that of aesthetics.

<sup>50</sup> A good example of this is Frederik Poulsen’s “Talking, Weeping, and Bleeding Statues: A Chapter in Religious Fraud,” *Acta Archaeologica* 16 (1945): 178-95, as his subtitle clearly elucidates.

of the divine hand, and it is this legendary finite status that makes it an object of devotion.<sup>51</sup> The mechanical object, like the miraculous icon, anxiously seeks to efface its own construction. As Michael Camille notes, it is in the image-not-made-by-human-hands tradition, which also seeks to deny its manufacture,<sup>52</sup> although, unlike the icon or relic, there is always a hand somehow invading the puppet or automata (one might say that the mechanical object denies its manufacture only after dutifully acknowledging it). Nonetheless images which miraculously spoke, wept, bled, nodded, etc. by mechanical means were intent on subtracting their relation to a human puppeteer and elevating the mechanism to the agency of a saintly animating prototype: a saint, Christ, the Virgin, or some other holy hand. In other words, it is not the projection of presence through the object that the manipulator was occulting, it was the hand of the animator that he was displacing elsewhere.

The destruction of a mechanically animated object is different from the destruction of one which has a solid and un-mechanized interior. Charles Baudelaire perceptively articulated the enthrallment of manipulation and apparent autonomy, as well as the effects of destruction, in his short text on the *Philosophy of Toys*. The poet writes:

The overriding desire of most children is to get at and *see the soul* of their toys, some at the end of a certain period of use, others *straightaway*. It is on the more or less swift invasion of this desire that depends the length of life of a toy... The child twists and turns his toy... From time to time he makes it re-start its mechanical motions, sometimes in the opposite direction. Its marvellous life comes to a stop... at last he opens it up, he is the stronger. But *where is the soul?*...<sup>53</sup>

Baudelaire's quote gives us a rather complex insight into the motivations behind such an "invasion." The child believes the mechanical toy has a "soul," but his faith is not strong enough to resist the temptation of needing to "see" this soul, not unlike the Doubting Thomas who needs to finger the wound of Christ in order to substantiate his belief in the resurrection. The child knows, more or less, how to set the toy in motion, what devices to "turn and twist," but his rough and rather urgent handling ends up breaking the delicate device. Upon opening the sculptural shell and discovering the mechanical viscera, the question remains, "where is the

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<sup>51</sup> Similarly, as we shall see in the forthcoming chapters (particularly chapter 5), this quality of being completed is crucial to automata and puppets, although here the concept of completion becomes more intricate. On the one hand, were these not somehow 'finished,' they would very pragmatically 'not function,' resist being 'wound up' and 'set in motion.' Once their integrity is broken, so too is their animated effect: if the mechanism breaks down they simply won't work any more. On the other hand, until an operator intervenes, indeed, sets them in motion, they remain to some extent incomplete and do not appear lifelike. Their persuasive autonomy is activated by their dependence on an external factor of some kind (usually human).

<sup>52</sup> Camille, 249.

<sup>53</sup> Charles Baudelaire, "A Philosophy of Toys," *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. J. Mayne (London: Phaidon, 1964), 197-203, 202-3.

soul," how does it work, what animates it? A disappointing winding-down takes place. A spell is broken.

To a certain degree, this spell is predicated on the object having an outside and a substantial inside. Belief is thus located for the spectator within this spatial axis of interior and exterior. The more transparent the relation between inside and outside, between illusory effect and disclosure of the mechanism, the more intricate is the position of faith. Automata and puppets are the perfect subjects of such a transparency, as their entire fascination revolves around the maker/performer (perhaps in complicity with the audience) maintaining a tantalizing equilibrium between illusion and perceptible technology of illusion. In chapter 14 of his *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge usefully termed such a position the "willing suspension of disbelief,"<sup>54</sup> a notion which has frequently been associated with theatre and will prove useful in the following chapters. It refers to an implied contract between audience and actors, whereby together they enter into a conspiracy of "poetic faith." The audience (and actors) are not duped into believing the actors are really the characters they represent. Nor does this knowledge eclipse the temporary belief in the sequence of events or characters presented to them. This is experienced as a split vision whereby one perceives both the impression of reality and the artifice at play. Puppets and automata are thus termed precisely because their animating device is to some extent manifest. Their deceptive lifelikeness is ingrained in their definition, implying an external and harmless source of manipulation. If in contrast this mechanism is well-hidden, as many an iconoclast Reformer set out to uncover, a different set of terms is employed, usually referring to the order of the inexplicable, knavish, demonic or divine. When the device is perceptible, the marvel a viewer might experience is in the order of technique and technology, though it is often confused (or suspected of confusing others) with the miraculous or the profanely idolatrous.

To return to the spatial structure of inside and outside, one would generally assume that a believer would not invade or dissect his object of belief, and that, again, one of the reasons the iconoclast violates the object of another's faith is to counteract its very "inviolability," to hurt the insentient statue, as well as rid the believer of his object of faith. The belief that lurks behind every efficacious image, in other words that something or someone is activating it from within or acting through it, is very literally true of the puppet and automaton. If the religious object retains a mystified relationship to its prototype, even when the theology of the image is at its most articulate (as it was for example during Byzantine iconophilia); the mechanical object, in contrast, lays bare its relationship to an animating force or instigator. The ontological status of the puppet and automaton is *already partly pried apart*. One sees into the object as

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<sup>54</sup> Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 1817, vol. 2, 6.



both a successful mechanism and an illusion, a truth and a deception. Again, a 'hand' is always implied somewhere inside the object. To put it simplistically, the locus of this dual vision is situated in the strings of the puppet, or the wind-up key within the automata. Here lies the converging point of inside and outside, the site of penetrability and incompleteness, the entrance for a manipulator. An iconoclast aiming to destroy the illusion will target this site of entrance, severing the delicate umbilical cord between object and animating device. Thus, the obvious cutting of the strings, or removal of the wind-up key, metaphorically and at times literally speaking, could be said to epitomise any iconoclastic attack, be this of a puppet, automaton, or image in general which has some relation to a prototype or hierarchy of prototypes. The act of destruction aims to detach the object from what it represents and whatever empowers, manipulates or animates it. In his invasion of the toy, Beaudelaire's child destroys the point of entrance for the completion of the effect of animation: he can no longer "twist and turn it," "make it restart its mechanical motions," his hand can no longer mediate between the object's autonomy and dependence.

In the margins of a history of iconoclasm, such animated images, purported confirmations of the idolatry inherent to theatre, have occasionally been the subject of (an even more) vicious destruction. This particular form of iconoclasm, if indeed it may be termed as such, seems directed not only towards the image and the viewer's belief in its efficacy, but more specifically towards the discernible artifice of its animation. It is this discerning of the mechanism of the puppet that remains problematic. During the Middle Ages, for example, no matter how well known these mechanisms became, writers of fiction would persist in teasing their readers that such things were done by "necromancy."<sup>55</sup> The illusory qualities of sculpture and theatre, attacked by the Church Fathers from the very start, appeared to overlap in the figures of the puppet and automaton, which are simultaneously 'on display' and performing. We have seen that prop-images in theatre were increasingly puppet-like.<sup>56</sup> More problematically, such mechanisms were also featuring within Churches, hanging from the cross or resting on the altar. Puppets and automata effectively, and at times purposefully, blurred the distinctions between miracles and marvels. The attitude of the European medieval church towards mechanical objects was ambiguous, to say the least. On the one hand it placed elaborate clocks with mechanized figures striking the hour in its own churches; on the other hand it severely condemned them. It is intriguing that so often precisely the most eminent men of science were accused of this kind of necromancy, suggesting a technology of illusion at play, as though

<sup>55</sup> R. Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 101; see also Camille, 244-258; William Eamon, "Technology as Magic in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance," *Janus* 70 (1983): 171-212, 175; Merriam Sherwood shows that much of the fiction concerning automata was in fact based on actual mechanical amusements in existence. "Magic and Mechanics in Medieval Fiction," *Studies of Philology* 44, 4 (1947): 567-92.

<sup>56</sup> Some enabled lifelike effects verging on ventriloquism. For example an image of the Antichrist for a Play at Modane from 1580 was required "by skill [to] move and alter its lips as a sign it is speaking." From a contract with the artists from 1580, trans. Meredith and Tailby, 105.

to imply the scientific mastery of the maker and the technological naivete of the viewer.<sup>57</sup> The same could be said of the Reformer suspecting the technology at play and mocking the gullibility of the believer. The spectacle of technological entrails was as important in reinstating a new type of faith as the miracles of the bleeding host had been earlier.

Take for example the Rood of Grace. During the suppression of monasteries that took place in sixteenth-century England, a puppet or possibly automaton crucifix was destroyed in an act of iconoclastic fury. The wondrous crucifix in question is the famous early sixteenth century Rood of Grace from the Cistercian Abbey of Boxley in Kent, a popular pilgrimage site visited and honoured even by the young Henry VIII in 1510, that by means of “certain engines and old wires” could nod its head, move its eyes, and shed tears. So expressive was the Rood that indeed “He acts – scowls with his eyes – turns his face away – distorts his nostrils – casts down his head – sets up a hump-back – assents – and dissents!”<sup>58</sup> It was the perfect example of both sculptural and theatrical idolatry and deception. The figure was thus “loosened... fixed as he had been to the wall, from his pedestal,”<sup>59</sup> freed from puppetry into inanimate (no longer animated) artifice. According to a letter from Geoffrey Chamber to Thomas Cromwell dated the 7<sup>th</sup> of February 1538,

I found in the image of the Rood called the Rood of Grace, the which heretofore hath been held with great veneration of people, certain engines and old wire, with old rotten sticks in the back of the same, that did cause the eyes of the same to move and stare in the head thereof like unto a living thing; and also nether lip in likewise to move as though it should speak; which, so famed was not a little strange to me and others that was present at the plucking down of the same; whereupon the abbot hearing the bruit, did thither resort, whom to my little wit and cunning, with others of the old monks, I did examine their knowledge of the premises; who do declare themselves to be ignorant of that same. (...) Further, when I had seen this strange sight, and considering that the inhabitants of the country of Kent had in times past a great devotion to the same, and to use continual pilgrimage thither, by the advice of others that were with me, [I] did convey the said image unto Maidstone this present Thursday, then being the market day, and in the chief of the market time, did show it openly unto all the people being there present, to see the false, crafty, and subtle handling thereof, to the dishonour of God, and illusion of the said people, who I daresay, that if in case the said monastery were to be defaced

<sup>57</sup> Thomas of Aquinas' alleged destruction of the speaking head made by Albertus Magnus is an apt illustration of this point. Cf. Bettina L. Knapp, “Albertus Magnus,” *The Prometheus Syndrome* (New York: The Whitston Publishing Company, 1979), 55-74. Similarly, centuries later, in an apocryphal story, the father of mechanistic philosophy René Descartes is said to have built a life-size automaton of a young woman, in order to prove his theories that all bodies function like mechanisms. She accompanied him on a sea voyage only to be overthrown by a frightened ship's captain. Cf. Gaby Wood, *Living Dolls: A Magical History of the Quest for Mechanical Life* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002).

<sup>58</sup> Letter of John Hoker, minister of Maidstone to Bullinger, May 1538, cited in G.C. Gorham, *Gleanings of a Few Scattered Ears During the Period of the Reformation in England and of the Times Immediately Succeeding: 1533-1588* (London: Bell and Dadd, 1857), 17-19, 17. On the Rood's history see William Lambard, *A Perambulation of Kent* (London: 1576), 182-6.

again, the King's Grace not offended, they would either pluck it down to the ground or else burn it, for they have the said matter in wondrous detestation and hatred, as at my repair unto your Lordship, and bringing the same image with me...<sup>60</sup>

The trickery of the image, its mechanical viscera, which Chamber emphasises as old and rusty, are laid bare to the people, flayed and displayed. The crucifix has a before and an after, centred on its outside and inside. As long as the mechanism was out of view, it was a miracle. From the moment it is plucked down and its anatomy examined, it becomes a false and crafty illusion. But Chamber is careful not to let the act of destruction fulfil itself just yet. For the time being, he lets a didactic invasion of the object take place: it is "shown openly to the people the craft of moving the eyes and lips, that all the people might see the illusion."<sup>61</sup> It is a strategy of dissection which represents a step towards the understanding and undoing of illusion. The veneration of the people of Kent now turns to detestation, for the spell has been broken. The object of faith is not autonomous and impenetrable enough, a point of entrance for "subtle handling" has been found, and in fact it is striking that in this account no animating hand is accused. The revulsion is clearly geared against the image, which is rotten, corrupt and illusory, not because it is an image per se but more importantly because it is an image which has a complex and deceitful *inside*. Reversing the Doubting Thomas paradigm, the inside of this crucified figure becomes an instrument of conversion from belief to disbelief. It is therefore important that the iconoclastic gesture of invasion only half consume the object. Only at a later stage does this initial prying into the object lead to irrevocable destruction. Indeed, a few weeks after this first exhibition of the image, it was broken up and burnt at Paul's Cross in London. The crucifix "was hurled neck-over-heels among the most crowded of the audience. And now was heard a tremendous clamour... he is snatched, torn, broken into pieces bit by bit, split up into a thousand fragments, and at last thrown into the fire; and there was an end of him!"<sup>62</sup> The act of destruction seems intended towards the performative image, but even more so to deface perceptible artifice. Once its technology of illusion is made visible, its transparency becomes intolerable. Its "engines and wires" are reduced to dust. For later protestants such images were a prime target, and in exposing these "popish delusions," the movement from belief to disbelieving derision is outlined as follows: "Rome's dark idolatry, and image-worship... [the protestant] will not only laugh at them, but utterly scorn and detest

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>60</sup> G.H. Cook, *Letters to Cromwell and Others on the Suppression of the Monasteries* (London: John Baker, 1965), 144-

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<sup>61</sup> C. Wriothesley, *A Chronicle of the England during the Reigns of the Tudors, from A.D. 1485 to 1559*, vol. 1, ed. W.D. Hamilton (London: Camden Society, 1875-77), 74. According to Hoker, the figure theatrically "opens himself" and then "plays his part skilfully," showing to all the mechanism of the illusion (p. 19). This strategy of opening up the automaton will later prove a cunning mode of showing in order to hide (cf. chapter 4).

<sup>62</sup> Hoker, 19; Wriothesley, 75-6; Gibson, *The Theatre of Devotion*, 15; M. MacLure, *Register of Sermons preached at Paul's Cross 1534-1642* (Ottawa: Dovehouse Editions, 1989), 21-22.

them, and the... promoters of them, as meer cheats, juggles and delusions.<sup>63</sup> Miracles are redefined as deceptions. As Altick wryly comments in *The Shows of London*, "Centuries later, the descendants of these same Londoners would willingly pay sixpence or more to see improved models of this primitive automaton in action."<sup>64</sup>

Other such instances of the non-transubstantiation of the object include for example exposing a relic of Christ's blood as mere honey clarified with saffron. Material realism reigned supreme in this war against incarnational aesthetics. Things did not have the body they claimed to have, and could not transubstantiate into (or out of) it. Thus in August of 1537, Hugh Latimer ordered that the statue of Our Lady of Worcester be stripped of its garments. When the Lady was naked, she proved not to be a Madonna at all, but an unidentified bishop of Worcester. This made no difference at all to Thomas Emans, who wrote "Though Our Lady's coat and jewels be taken away from her, the similitude of this is no worse to pray unto... than it was before."<sup>65</sup> Male or female, the naked statue's interior was unacceptable as an object of worship. Such transvestism is a fascinating component of the statue or puppet. A similarly sexless (or sexful) example, this time moving away from the realm of animated image of worship to the animated image of spectacle, from the accusation of puppet-hood to its ostentation, can be found in Ben Jonson's play within a play, *Bartholomew Fair*.

Theatre, more than any other art form, offers a tangible aesthetics of incarnation in its use of live actors. To take this a step further, puppets and automata, more than any other inanimate art form, can be made to emulate the presence of live actors performing. It is therefore hardly surprising that alongside the puritanical attacks on art and theatre,<sup>66</sup> puppetry was occasionally attacked, though it was also tolerated as a low form of unthreatening culture, and even ambiguously used as an educational tool in the conflict between iconoclasts and iconophiles.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Mercurius Hibernicus (pseudonym), *A Pacquet of Popish Delusions, False Miracles, and Lying Wonders... exposed to the shame of Popery* (London, 1681), 3. The aim of the protestant pamphlet was also to highlight the divisions and inconsistencies of the catholic faith, "mongst themselves divided worse than we." On the rood of Kent, 25-31.

<sup>64</sup> Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1978), 6. Cf. chapter

<sup>65</sup> John Phillip, *The Reformation of Images: Destruction of Art in England, 1536-1660* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1973), 75.

<sup>66</sup> Although historical accounts show that puritanical attacks on theatre were more vitriolic in the press than in governmental pursuit, and that much theatre did survive under Cromwell. Tudor Protestant leaders in civil and church government recognised drama as a means of winning popular consent for religious reform. Cf. Paul Whitfield White, *Theatre and Reformation: Protestantism, Patronage, and Playing in Tudor England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>67</sup> To quote one example, in 1599, the Mayor of Chester made himself unpopular by trying to abolish certain abuses that had crept into the performances of the local plays, including men dressing up farcically as women and devils, and "god on strings." George Speaight, *The History of the English Puppet Theatre* (London: Robert Hale, 1955), 54. But puppetry also passed unnoticed. In 1642 severe puritan laws were passed to ensure that theatres in England remain closed, but actors complained that puppet shows "are still kept with uncontrolled allowance" (*Ibid.*, 70). Cf. Margaret Rogerson, "English Puppets and the survival of Religious Theatre," *Theatre Notebook* 52, 2 (1998): 91-111, who points to the fact that the nativity scene was more acceptable in that it represented the silent and passive infant Jesus, whereas the puppet of his adult crucifixion would have been intolerably idolatrous (p. 99). A useful study of puppetry as a symbol of cultural subordination and lowly culture is Shershow, *Puppets and "Popular" Culture*. For theatre and iconoclasm see O'Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye*.

The puppet was attacked primarily when found hiding in the church in the guise of a still image. Very occasionally it was used by preachers as a mode of theatricalised iconoclasm. In 1547, for example, in another act of iconoclasm to take place at Paul's Cross almost a decade after the Rood of Grace incident, Bishop Barlow used two puppet images to point a sermon against idolatry, one of which was an image of the Resurrection "which put his legs out of the sepulchre, and blessed with his hand, and turned his head." At the end of his discourse, the puppets were given to the boys to break into pieces.<sup>68</sup>

But the following example does quite the opposite. Here, the conflict between inanimate puppet and iconoclast takes a very different turn. In 1614, Ben Jonson's play *Bartholomew Fair* parodied the puritan attack on theatre. In the puppet-play within the play, Jonson makes a puritan by the name of Zeal-of-the-Land Busy discuss idolatry with a puppet, a "heathenish idol" itself, in a dialogue of sheer ridicule. At a crucial point, the puritan accuser says of the stage: "Yes, and my main argument against you, is, that you are an abomination: for the male among you putteth on the apparel of the female, and the female of the male." To this the puppet Dionysius responds "It is your stale arguments against the players, but it will not hold against the puppets; for we have neither male nor female amongst us. And thou may'st see, if thou wilt, like a malicious purblind zeal as thou art! (*the puppet takes up his garment*)."<sup>69</sup> While the puritan accuses theatre of deception through transvestism, the puppet destroys this illusion of representation by pointing at its own abstraction which transcends any notion of sexuality. As Marjorie Garber has shown, theatre is inherently transvestite<sup>70</sup> (which could be read as a sexualised tran- or con-substantiation!), but here such performative transformation exceeds any notion of gender. This is a superb instance of transparency using the ultimate weapon of exhibitionism. The inside is revealed as a sexless piece of wood, cloth, or the animator's hand – an even greater illusion than the deceit of cross-dressing. Indeed, the indecent revelation of the puppet's material constitution, almost more shocking than any genital display, resolutely emphasises and acknowledges the technology of illusion, leaving the accuser speechless and converted, as he himself says "I am changed, and I will become beholder with you!"

<sup>68</sup> E.K. Chamber, *The Medieval Stage*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903), 157; MacLure, *Register of Sermons*, 28-29; Wriothsley, 1.

<sup>69</sup> Ben Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair* (London and New York: Methuen Student Editions, 1986), 120.

<sup>70</sup> Garber, *Vested Interests*. More specifically on *Bartholomew Fair*, see Laura Levine, "The Nothing Under the Puppet's Costume: Jonson's Suppression of Marlowe in *Bartholomew Fair*," *Men in Women's Clothing: Antitheatricality and Effeminization, 1579-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 89-107.



8. Venetian Transformative Puppet, mid 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Like the previous example of the Rood of Grace, the transition from outside to inside of the object becomes a trajectory first for parody and then for conversion. What would usually represent the site of entrance and penetrability in terms of sexuality, becomes the site of penetrability in terms of illusion. Be this the hand of the puppeteer or a piece of wood, whatever is made visible through this skirt-lifting does indeed give further momentary knowledge into the technology of the object of illusion, albeit by will of the iconophilic playwright rather than the iconophobic puritan Zeal-of-the-Land Busy. As a gesture of desecration, it functions parallel to a gesture of iconoclasm in that it reduces the object to its mechanism and materiality. However, unlike the iconoclastic revelation of the Rood of Grace, there is no shift from belief to disbelief. Instead, the result of this exposure is a movement from disbelief to a “willing suspension of disbelief,” or perhaps *consubstantiated* double-vision.

The moment of conversion as an act of anatomisation will be fully explored in chapter 4 on automata. This almost surgical procedure can be associated with a form of iconoclasm which is not simply an obliteration of the object of faith (although this might follow), but rather a more subtle violation of integrity so as to reveal a vulnerable and demystified material fragmentation. In this sense, one might conclude that to some degree the mechanical object, puppet or automaton, implicitly contains an unconsumed act of iconoclasm. By nature incomplete and fragmentary, there is always a hand invading the object, destructive, breaking it open, prying it apart. From another perspective, this same hand is also iconophilic, constructive, canonising the image, finishing it, bringing it to life.

The Youthful Mother puppet, transparent like a crystal, clean, pure, true, comes in on her knees, scrubbing everything constantly, obsessively; she cleans a painting, Fragonard's *Woman on a Swing*, it too suspended, hanging on an imaginary wall. As she turns away the painting becomes a 'dirty' pornographic image, a real vagina, shockingly fleshly in comparison to her transparent see-throughness. Her body functions like a magnifying glass. Nothing can hide within her, she has no cavities, no hollows, no space for containment.

The Youthful Mother puppet sways on the swing, naked, legs bent, up and open, ostentatiously (gynaecologically) showing the place of her sex to her Baby of Advanced Years puppet. The swing stops at maximum elevation, even more gapingly wide-open. She has no genitalia for the transparent aperture of the vagina is pure penetrability, a crystalline site of entrance swinging on a swing. His thick eyes seem clammed shut, wooden, obtuse. He cannot see what she does not have. There is something unbearable, not just in her exhibitionist nudity and overtly titillating sexuality which tortures her son, the son who can't grow up as he grows old. But the even greater jolt lies in the double negative of a puppet on a swing, a second destabilisation of gravity, a complex interference with the forces that pull upwards and those weighing it down, as if to return it the bodily weight it is denying. A similar double negative occurs with the drowned dog puppet, a floating skeleton, drifting upside down in the sea. These puppets are undone, yet no strings are cut. Every once in a while, to offset the puppet-world of ungravity, an old pair of empty shoes, human-size, fall heavily with a thud, reiterating the downward pull of gravity, the inescapable connection to the floor.<sup>71</sup>




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<sup>71</sup> From *The Swing at Night*, puppet play by Howard Baker, premiered at The Barge Puppet Theatre, London, May 2001. The question of gravity is dealt with in chapter 5.

## 3

*Tableaux Vivants**Inside the Statue*

This is the place to mention another favourite pursuit of Neapolitans in general. I mean the crèches (*presepe*), which are seen in all the churches at Christmas time, realistically depicting the adoration of the shepherds, angels and kings, grouped together more or less completely, richly, and splendidly. In cheerful Naples these exhibits have also ascended to the flat housetops, where a light framework, like a shed, is built and decorated with evergreen trees and bushes... It may even have occurred sometimes that living persons were mingled with the dolls, and gradually it became one of the most significant entertainments in wealthy and aristocratic families also to present secular pictures, drawn from history or literature, in their palaces for an evening's entertainment.<sup>1</sup>

Although Goethe possibly never saw these Neapolitan pursuits he so imaginatively describes, his interjection that the nativity crib might occasion the merging of the living and the inanimate, and that such a custom should evolve into the secular entertainment of tableaux vivants, serves as the ligament between the preceding and the following chapters. Crib-making (consisting of flexible figures made of an iron framework which could be moulded into a variety of postures) reached its apotheosis between 1740-70, but the art was still at a very high level at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The aim of the cribs was to convey with great realism the message of the gospel so that spectators could participate in the events portrayed. The spectators moved along the stage from the annunciation to the shepherds... the parallels with medieval theatre and the *sacri monti* discussed earlier are evident. However, whereas the crib scene represented a recognizable Christian holy prototype, the tableau vivant enacted the iconography of an art object, and often involved the guesswork of the cultured connoisseur (or the acculturation of the non-connoisseur).

Moving away from the realm of religion and ritual, several of the aforementioned practices, performative idioms, conceptualisations and even belief structures find their materialization in secular activities. After seeing the image come to life, or dying into cadaverous incorruption,

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<sup>1</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Entry from Naples, May 27, 1787, *Italian Journey*, trans. Robert R. Heitner (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), 262. As Goethe points out, tableaux did indeed start off



one wonders, can I *become* this miraculous image (without dying)? The Renaissance introduction of portrayal from the flesh, imitation of the live model into image-hood, the individual into the allegorical (and back again), opens up to a reverse process whereby models lose themselves in endless posing, oscillating in the strange netherworld between the image they are and the image they are about to become. As Arthur Symons would write in the late nineteenth century at the height of tableaux vivants staging: "A picture, for the most part, is an imitation of life, and a living picture is life imitating an imitation of itself, which seems a little roundabout."<sup>2</sup> Perhaps, like the confused Pippo del Fabbro in Vasari's biography of Jacopo Sansovino – the model who, after prolonged naked posing for Sansovino's *Bacchus*, came to believe he was a statue and posed on the rooftops of Florence, now as Bacchus, now as an Apostle, a Prophet, a soldier, before going mad and eventually dying of cold<sup>3</sup> – this simultaneous loss of prototype and proliferation of prototypes will eventually refract into a game of charades.

The tableau vivant hovers indistinctly between the incorrupt cadaver, the theatrical prop and the iconoclastic invasion of the performing image, although rather than hiding within or flaying and displaying its inside, one chooses to become the image by temporarily hardening one's surface into opaque stillness, freezing into a material object of which one is the 'inside.' Unlike the incorrupt cadaver, the tableau vivant must appear to crack were it to break. It is the performance of the image without performativity, for it is not pliable, not yet a puppet. The living picture lacks articulation, it has ossified into oneness, and when it slackens this is only so as to shift into the next pose, the next statue. The originals seem ever farther away, harder to grasp, whilst the authentic person living the statue stands there in a seizure, seizing an image other than themselves.<sup>4</sup> The choreographic force shifts from interactive tactility to stilled movement, literally "caught in the act," as it were. In an increasing era of copies and reproductions, still photography is anticipated, bodies seem almost to prepare for the prolonged posing of early daguerreotypes. But photography is not the focus of this chapter, as we look instead at the posers, the pre-photographic bodies which in their three-dimensionality are akin to sculpture. The prototypical original of these tableaux vivants is a mummified, often museum-ified, sample of inanimateness, all the dead Niobes of the neoclassical world,

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as the entertainment of the well-bred and wealthy, and, as with the Hamiltons (cf. below), often reflected their private art collections.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Symons, "The Living Pictures," *The New Review* 2, 11 (1894): 461-70, 464.

<sup>3</sup> "taking a sheet or other large piece of cloth, and wetting it, he would wrap it round his naked body, as if he were a model of clay or rags, and arrange the folds, and then, climbing up to some extraordinary place, and settling himself now in one attitude and now in another... standing thus for a period of two hours without speaking, not otherwise than as if he had been a motionless statue." Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, vol. 9, trans. G. De Vere (London: Medici Society, 1912-15), 192.

<sup>4</sup> On fictions and pathologies of one body inside another in Europe and America in the second half of the nineteenth-century, see Hillel Schwartz, "The Three-Body Problem and the End of the World," *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, vol. 2, 407-65.

the volcanized citizens of Pompeii, passing through the body of the living almost like a catatonic fit.<sup>5</sup>



With wonderful skill, the sculptor Pygmalion carved a figure out of snow-white ivory “and he fell in love with his own work. It had the face of a real maiden, who, you would have thought, was living, and, if self respect were not stopping her, wanted to move; his art was so hidden by his art.” He marvels, consumed by passion he kisses her, speaks to her, holds her, dresses her, lays her in bed, “believes that his fingers sunk into its limbs... afraid that a bruise would come to its body after he pressed it.” He asks Venus to grant him a bride “like” the one of ivory, and Venus, understanding his subtlety, grants him the real thing. The statue grows warm, “where it was touched, the ivory softened and lost its hardness, and sank beneath his fingers and yielded, as Hymettian wax melts in the sun and, if worked on by the thumb, is moulded into many shapes and becomes useful from use itself.” He is stupefied, uncertain, running his hands over her again and again to confirm her animation. “She was flesh; her veins leapt when worked on by his thumb... The maiden felt the kisses he had given and blushed, and, raising her timid eyes to the light, saw the sky and her lover together.” This famous Ovidian narrative,<sup>6</sup> told by Orpheus as he mourns his lost Eurydice, has come to typify the animation of the inanimate outside of the religious context. It is an archetype that epitomises the viewpoint of the yearning lover.<sup>7</sup> This is the predominant voice, that of the maker’s desire, of the object being seen to come to life. The sculptor longs for the life of his creation, for hardness to yield to softness. She, in turn, from her state of cold, hard, insentient (but possibly bruisable) white ivory, becomes warm, soft (mouldable) crimsoning flesh. That is all we know of her animation, her metamorphosis from inanimate to animate. We feel her ivory bone become throbbing flesh *under his fingers*, from his sentiency, not hers. All the signs of her animation blush forth, reveal themselves as *symptoms*, not experiences. We diagnose her coming to life from the perspective of flesh looking at inscrutable stone. We know she feels his kisses

<sup>5</sup> Coined by German psychologist Karl Kahlbaum in 1874, the term ‘catatonia’ (later subsumed into general schizophrenia) referred to a tensing of the muscles in a statuesque manner, accompanied by stupor, mutism, and absence of movements (even of respiration and eyelids). Although partially relevant and certainly coherent with sections of the timeframe of this chapter, we will be focusing on the deliberate strategy of statue-posing as aesthetic practice (not as a psycho-physical condition categorised as illness).

<sup>6</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphosis IX-XII*, trans. D.E. Hill (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1999), Book X: 243-97, 53-57. Interestingly, the narrative that precedes the Pygmalion story is one of medusa-like petrification, in which the first prostitutes, shameless unblushing women, are turned to stone as punishment. Pygmalion’s sculpture appears as an undoing of this lascivious womanhood, his creation is a clear reaction to the “wickedness” of their lives, “the many faults nature has given to the female mind.”

<sup>7</sup> Maurizio Bettini’s *Il Ritratto dell’Amante* (Torino: Einaudi, 1992) is a useful study of the love-triangle of the lover, the beloved and the portrait, where often the simulacrum proves more than the original. On the desire of images, which is not really the focus of this chapter, see also Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, specifically the “Arousal by Image” chapter, 317-344; Mario Praz, “L’amore delle statue,” *Fiori Freschi* (Garzanti: Milano, 1982), 423-27. ‘Pygmalionism’ was a term coined by Havelock Ellis (*Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, vol. 2 (New York: Random

because she blushes, that she sees because her eyes are raised. There is no way inside her, no insight into the melting.

Although examples of animate statues abound, particularly in literary accounts, it is really only after the emergence of Northern-European Protestant impulses to demystify the image, as we saw in the previous chapter, that the belief in its miraculous or diabolical powers begins to change. If earlier we saw enactments of sacred tableaux vivants in the Corpus Christi pageants, or attempts to 'get at' the statue by destroying it, now a new secular infiltration of the image becomes possible. No longer a profanation or a participation, the becoming statue can present a sequence of artworks compressed in one body, a philosophical exercise, a choreographic strategy. Moving bodies freeze into sculptures, and sequential posing turns back into dance. The mediating hands that previously touched the image either in the making, or in religious veneration and ritualistic mobilisation; that aroused, caressed it, dressed it, adorned it in sexual longing; those of a dishonourably pious puppeteer that activated it so as to exploit the gullible; or indeed the incensed fists of iconoclasts that invaded the image, flayed it open and revealed its material inefficacy... these hands are no longer necessary. The body itself can produce an image "not-made-by-human-hands." A change has occurred, a crack in the image that enables a viewer to enter inside, not to peek at the mechanism nor to uncover its blunt materiality, but rather to interiorise its hardened inanimateness, to *become* image.

Who has lived to survive the tale of Medusa, the immobilisation, petrification by gaze? In a reversal of the animation of Galatea (as Pygmalion's sculpture was later christened), there begin to appear many examples of live persons emulating the stillness of the statue, de-animating, as it were, on stage. Their becoming-statue is performative, offering itself to the gaze, stilling the body to facilitate a more brazen unreciprocated view. This immobile body does not look back, nor does it see itself. In Walter Benjamin's view, "this prying an object from its shell"<sup>8</sup> would entail a voluntary abdication of the uniqueness of aura, a human original shedding itself in order to become blind copy:

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House, 1936), 188) to define the erotomania of falling in love with statues, but the phenomenon was already being studied in the late nineteenth century by the new discipline of sexology.

<sup>8</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations*, trans. H. Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), 211-244, 217. Whereas the Byzantine replication of images involved a dissemination of the hypostatic image, in Benjamin's account of early modern experience the mechanically reproduced image loses its hypostatic and participatory relation to the original. For further references to the relation of Benjamin's notion of the aura to Byzantine art, see my Laurea dissertation, *Variazioni sulla Visibilità dell'Aureola*, University of Bologna, Italy, 1998, available in an abridged form as an English article on <http://www.unibo.it/parol/files/sats.htm> (1 July 2002).

One might relate this non-reciprocated gaze to other theories of spectatorship, specifically the empire of the gaze argued by Michel Foucault in relation to the panopticon and surveillance in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1977). Here the gaze is determined by the power relations of knowledge, not gender, as argued by Laura Mulvey (cf. below, ff. 37)

looking at someone carries the implicit expectation that our look will be returned by the object of our gaze. Where this expectation is met... there is an experience of aura to the fullest extent... Experience of the aura thus rests on the transposition of a response common in human relationships to the relationship between inanimate or natural object and man. The person we look at, or who feels he is being looked at, looks at us in turn. To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return.<sup>9</sup>

Following Benjamin, in becoming inanimate object, the seeing person withdraws into another realm which excludes the viewers, denies their gaze whilst allowing them to look. Unlike the sacred image, through which the original looks back, responds to ritual enactment and, as we have seen earlier, acknowledges the believer, this image is opaque, its original eludes the spectator even when it is clearly recognisable. Presence is withdrawn to enable object-hood to appear. Pygmalion's yearning is precisely for presence, a longing for her look to acknowledge him in a reciprocation both tactile and visual. Indeed women, more than men, seem to be the privileged species to oscillate between states of hardness and softness, stillness and mobility, *pose/place/pause* and continuity, or so we are made to believe. The predominant scholarship on pygmalionism situates it within the context of the misogyny and desire of the sculpture's (male) maker, leading to a reiteration of this outsider view. We are led to believe that these living statues are forced into immobility by their lookers, but why not consider the possibility of their withdrawal into stillness as a voluntary act that restructures looking? Let us attempt this reverse perspective, one of *self-made statuary*. Just as automata express the principle of self-motivated movement (as we shall see in the following chapter), tableaux vivants, statue posing, might contain the self-motivated principle of stillness, perhaps as a soothing contrast to the increasing mobility and speed of nineteenth-century life in the cities, the unruly swarms of crowds, the curious patterns of movement between the distracted, detached and alienated gaze of the wandering *flâneur* and the immobile or glittering refractions of the displays of the arcade and the department store that characterize modernism.<sup>10</sup> The question arises: when there is no longer a sacred prototype to emulate, is the becoming-image conditioned merely by the being-looked-at?<sup>11</sup> When enacting stillness for an audience, who or what choreographic force immobilises and reanimates?



<sup>9</sup> Benjamin, "On Some Motives in Baudelaire," *Illuminations*, 152-198, 184.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Benjamin on Beaudelaire and Chris Jenks, "Watching Your Step: The History and Practice of the *Flâneur*," *Visual Culture*, ed. Chris Jenks (NY: Routledge, 1995), 142-60; Jonathan Crary argues that disintegration of the perceptual field characterises modernism, using as examples the painters Manet, Seurat, and Cézanne. From the late nineteenth century, perception is psychologically, philosophically, neurologically and cinematographically conceived of as unstable and distracted. *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Jean-Pierre Vernant offers a fascinating reading of the Medusa figure in Ancient Greece: he who looks at Medusa is at once blinded and possessed by the face he looks at. The gaze of Medusa invades the spectator and transforms

The literary legacy of the Pygmalion story is vast and consistent throughout the centuries, ranging from the late Medieval *Roman de la rose* well into the present. The multifaceted Pygmalion narrative has been interpreted and reinterpreted as the ultimate goal of mimesis, an emblem of creative impulse, a satire on sexual desire or on didactic inculcation, etc.. The actual performance and embodiment of animation (or de-animation) has rarely been read into it, although it has often been tacitly enacted. Indeed the stage, the space of action par excellence, has occasionally usurped the stillness of the pedestal. From the Renaissance onwards, countless enactments materialise before an audience, mainly in the form of comedy which plays on the Pygmalion viewer's desire and wish-fulfilment, or the comedy of errors that arises from mistaking a dead statue for a living presence.<sup>12</sup> Famous instances include Shakespeare's Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*, or the statue in Molière's *Don Juan*.<sup>13</sup> But most performances of statuary were predicated not on the revelatory moment of animation, but on the consequences that animation might generate or the genealogical cause for petrification. Animation as theatrical fulfilment, as the end of the performance, gives a greater insight into how one might conceive the state of stone-like existence, and the transformation from stone to flesh, and vice versa. More than a theatre of the word this image lends itself to the intangibility of a theatre of movement (undoubtedly a harder retrieval for the cultural historian). Although theatre remained essentially rhetorical, it was becoming increasingly more pantomimic and, during the eighteenth century, English and French writers would suggest that the actor look to pictorial or sculptural artworks for inspiration.<sup>14</sup> Thus, following a tradition epitomized by the actor David Garrick, who at climactic moments would freeze in "statuesque attitude, as if waiting for the applause to die down,"<sup>15</sup> William Cooke suggested in 1775 that male actors study the two Antinouses, the Hercules Farnese, the Apollo Belvedere, the Apollo De Medicis, the Caracalla, the Fighting and Dying Gladiators, whilst women should look to the Venus de

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him into a mask to be seen rather than to see through. *La Morte negli Occhi: Figure dell'altro nell'Antica Grecia*, trans. C. Saletti (Bologna: il Mulino, 1985), 82-83.

<sup>12</sup> One of the most complete studies of the Pygmalion myth (for there are many), complete with bibliography referencing almost all the re-interpretations throughout the ages, is Ana Rueda's *Pigmalion y Galatea: Refracciones Modernas de un Mito* (Madrid: Fundamentos, 1998). See also Marina Warner's *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1985), especially "The Making of Pandora," 213-240. In these studies the direction of desire appears to be one-way, from man to statuesque woman. Interestingly, Frances Borzello points to the strangely overemphasised fascination with the formula of male artists/female models, when historical evidence points to a more predominant use of male models, or indeed examples the reverse (female artist/male model). *The Artist's Model* (London: Junction Books, 1982), 15.

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth Gross discusses both these texts in his *The Dream of the Moving Statue* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992). Cf. also Leonard Barkan, "Living Sculptures: Ovid, Michelangelo, and *The Winter's Tale*," *ELH* 48, 4 (1981): 639-667.

<sup>14</sup> On the interaction between theatre and the visual arts, see Shearer West, *The Image of the Actor: Verbal and Visual Representation in the Age of Garrick and Kemble* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991); Martin Meisel, *Realizations. Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and the Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Ratch, *The Players Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1989), 69.

Medicis, the Venus De Calipaedia, Diana, Flora and the Graces.<sup>16</sup> If in chapter 1 we saw Clement of Alexandria warn idolaters that by merely looking at the image they would become like it anaesthetised into stone, now such 'idolatry,' sanitized of any religious threat, resurfaces as theatrical technique. One might rephrase *Psalm 135:18* into *Like them be those who look at them*.

Movement-based performance such as Opera and Ballet began to attract a greater audience, moving away from purely spoken drama. One of the first opera-ballets to enact the scene of the sculpture's animation is the last act of *Le Triomphe des Arts* entitled "La Sculpture," performed at the Académie Royale de Musique in Paris in 1700. The inaugural scene takes place in the womb of the sculptor's studio, where Pygmalion waxes lyrical about his love for his sculpture. At a certain point she is animated, or so we learn from the libretto notes, and she speaks:

Que vois je? & qu'est-ce que je pense?  
 D'où me viennent ces mouvements?  
 Que dois-je croire, & par quelle puissance  
 Puis-je exprimer mes sentiments?  
 Mais, quel est cet Objet? Mon ame en est ravie,  
 Je goûte, en le voyant, le plaisir le plus doux.  
 Ah! Je sens que le Dieux me donnent la vie,  
 Ne me la donnent que pour vous.<sup>17</sup>

The "what do I see, what do I think" is immediately followed by her potential for movement and power of expression, clearly bestowed upon her from the outside. Her first words, questions, reflect on her subjection to forces outside herself, her passivity. She still experiences herself from the viewer's perspective: how can she move, what animates her, who puppeteers her? She is voicing our questions, not her own answers (the only real answer being that the motive of her animation is to gratify Pygmalion). We imagine the dancer, up until then painfully immobile, ignorant of her admirer, suddenly loosening position and turning toward him. She recognises herself through him, in his eyes, and thus conclude countless enactments of Pygmalion. These performances would have invariably been conceived and choreographed by men, but an interesting example of a woman putting herself forward as Pygmalion's statue is the often overlooked ballet-pantomime of the French dancer Marie Sallé, an innovator who would view dance as an expressive medium rather than one of formal constrictions, anticipating the ideas of Noverre by some thirty years. On 14 February 1734, she performed at

<sup>16</sup> William Cooke, *The Elements of Dramatic Criticism* (London: Kearsly, Robinson, 1775), 200-1.

Covent Garden in London, presenting a new conception of her own *choreographic agency*, putting her theories into practice. The London correspondent of the *Mercure de France* records this sell-out event as follows:

Mlle. Sallé, with but little consideration for the embarrassing position in which she has placed me, has charged me, Sir, to afford you some account of her successes...

For nearly two months *Pygmalion* has been given without any signs of failing interest. This is the theme. Pygmalion enters his studio accompanied by his sculptors, who execute a characteristic dance, mallet and chisel in hand. Pygmalion bids them to throw open the back of the studio which, like the forepart, is adorned with statues. One in the middle stands out above all the others and attracts the admiration of everyone. Pygmalion examines it, considers it, and sighs. He puts his hands on the feet, then on the body; he examines all the contours, likewise the arms, which he adorns with precious bracelets. He places a rich necklace about the neck and kisses the hands of his beloved statue. At last he becomes enraptured with it; he displays signs of unrest and falls into a reverie, then prays to Venus and beseeches her to endow the marble with life.

Venus heeds his prayer; three rays of light appear, and, to the surprise of Pygmalion and his followers, the statue, to suitable music, gradually emerges from its insensibility; she expresses astonishment at her new existence and at all the objects which surround her.

Pygmalion, amazed and transported, holds out his hand for her to step from her position; she tests the ground, as it were, and gradually steps into the most elegant poses that a sculptor could desire. Pygmalion dances in front of her as if to teach her how to dance. She repeats after him the simplest as well as the most difficult and complicated steps; he endeavours to inspire her with the love he feels, and succeeds.

You can imagine, Sir, what the different stages of such an action can become when mimed and danced with the refined and delicate grace of Mlle. Sallé. She has dared to appear in this *entrée* without pannier, skirt, or bodice, and with her hair down; she did not wear a single ornament on her head. Apart from her corset and petticoat she wore only a simple dress of muslin draped about her in the manner of a Greek statue.<sup>18</sup>

Not only did she devise the piece and embarrassingly arrange for its publicity, she herself innovates in her bodily exhibitionism, hair flowing and scantily dressed in draped muslin. The use of thin veils that reveal as much as they hide will come to characterise the emulation of

<sup>17</sup> Michel La Barre (composer) and Antoine Houdart de la Motte (words): "La Sculpture," last musical act of *Le Triomphe des Arts*, opera ballet, Académie Royale de Musique, Paris 1700, in *Recueil General des Opera representez par l'Académie Royale de Musique* (Paris: Christophe Ballard, 1700), 40-48, 45.

<sup>18</sup> Cyril W. Beaumont, "Marie Sallé," *Three French Dancers of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century* (London: Wyman and Sons, 1934), 18-25, 21-22. See also Emile Dacier, *Une Danseuse de l'Opera sous Louis XV: Mlle Sallé* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1909). Her innovations were even more audacious in a ballet she devised several months later to the opera of *Alcina*, by Handel, where she appeared dressed as a man. This time she was hissed, not applauded, for dressing up rather than dressing down. On later instances of the *danseuse en travesty* see Lynn Garafola, "The Travesty Dancer in Nineteenth-Century Ballet," *Moving History/Dancing Cultures: A Dance History Reader*, eds. A. Dils and A. C. Albright (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 210-17, which includes a discussion of the ballet *Coppélia*, which I discuss in chapter 5.

statues. In its stiffened constriction, the living statue must appear un-hieratic, unrestricted, natural and graceful like a classical sculpture. Sallé's animation is motivated by the music, which draws her out of her "insensibility," but she is still positioned on the pedestal, implying that her initial animation is merely an astonished melting movement. Pygmalion offers his hand to bring her down off the pedestal into the realm of lively movement, and she, hesitant, tests the ground, as if unsure of its solidity in comparison to the immovable base of the pedestal. Although animate, she still shifts between sculptural poses, displaying a catalogue of desirable sculptures. Pygmalion must teach her to soften the transitions, as it were, from sequential poses to dance. He dances and she imitates, although it is implicit that in reality as choreographer Sallé danced and he imitated. The dance class becomes a lesson in love. An internal mirroring of gazes takes place: he looks at her, she comes to life, sees him, he sees her come to life, he shows her how to dance, she dances and is looked at. But throughout the performance the audience is led to look at her through him, at first through his adoring examination of each sculptural contour, then through his inculcation of bodily grace, culminating in the view of her refined and delicate dance-mime movements, finally stripped of the filter of his directional gaze. Her coming to life is a gradual acquisition of mobility and grace; animation is equivalent to dance.

Sallé shows a willingness to "inanimate" autonomously, of her own free will, and, more importantly, her own *choreography*, regardless of any male subjection (despite the fact that the narrative of animation she is enacting does subscribe to that rationale). This desire becomes more and more predominant to the extent that Etienne Bonnot, the Abbé de Condillac, postulates this becoming-statue as the basis for his philosophical exercise. In his *Treatise on the Sensations*, written in 1754, he hypothesises something between a statue and a human being with an impervious marble exterior, whose organs are aroused into activity successively by sensations triggered by the external world. This coincides with his contemporary Diderot's interest in the psychology of the deaf and dumb, and in England the first successful restoration of sight through the operation of removal of cataracts from a person born blind. As in *Psalm* 135:15-16 (cf. chapter 1), statuary is the equivalent of a breathless deaf-dumb-blind human: "They have mouths but they speak not; they have eyes, but they see not; they have ears, but they hear not; nor is there any breath in their mouths." It is paramount to Condillac's exercise that the reader *become* the statue, interiorise the state of insentiency in order to gradually awaken to animation. He begins his treatise with the following warning:

Thus I forewarn the reader that it is very important to put himself exactly in the place of the statue we are going to observe. He should begin to live when it does, have only a single sense when it has only one, acquire only those ideas it acquires, contract only the habits that it contracts: in short, he must be only what it is. The statue will judge things as we do only when



it has all the sense and all the experiences we do: and we will judge in the same way it judges only when we suppose ourselves deprived of everything that it lacks.<sup>19</sup>

This is one of the first modern proposals of reciprocation between animate and inanimate – each morphing in the direction of the other. But the becoming-statue is not subject to any external gaze or external desire (unless one counts that of Condillac). Condillac's argument centres on the interior world of the statue, its gradual penetrability and sentience to the external world from the *inside out*, as opposed to the outside in, which tends to characterise Pygmalion narratives up until then. Here, the barrier of the sculptural shell is experienced from within rather than from without. It is not the sculptor touching the hard stone and feeling it soften and “yield”; the sculpture itself feels its own porosity. From within the senses are awakened progressively, at first one by one, then in combination with the others. But it is a superficial awakening, one limited to the specific areas of the body associated with the senses. Thus, even if Condillac grants his statue a sense of taste, the sculpture has no further interiority than the actual mouth area, although he also endows it with appetite, a hunger which obviously remains insatiable. “Having given sentience only to the inside of the mouth's statue, I cannot lead it to take nourishment. But I suppose that the air brings it, at my pleasure, all sorts of tastes, and serves to nourish it whenever I judge it necessary.”<sup>20</sup> The statue cannot truly absorb or take in the external world, and the remaining parts of the body are still as solid and impenetrable as a rock. How alive Condillac's experiment ever becomes is hard to ascertain. Even when he grants it movement, the statue still has no idea of movement. It remains somewhat puppeteered by Condillac, who for example “moves its arm”<sup>21</sup> for it, since it has no impetus of its own. Eventually, curiosity would motivate it to mobility, just as pain would immobilise it:

*Pain suspends the desire to move.* In the beginning, the statue only drags itself about; then it moves on its hands and feet; finally coming across some elevation, it is curious to discover what lies above and it finds itself, as by chance, on its feet. It totters, it walks, leaning against everything that can help it to stay up; it falls, it hurts itself, and feels pain anew. It does not dare get up, it scarcely dares move: the fear of pain offsets the hope of pleasure...<sup>22</sup>

Like a toddling child, the sculpture discovers verticality and the possibility of locomotion, but interestingly, the stillness characteristic of inanimate sculpture becomes associated with fear,

<sup>19</sup> Etienne Bonnot de Condillac, “A Treatise on the Sensations,” 1754, *Philosophical Writings of Etienne Bonnot, Abbé de Condillac*, trans. F. Philip (London: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1982), 154-339, 155. Cf. J.L. Carr, “Pygmalion and the *Philosophes*: The Animated Statue in Eighteenth-Century France,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 23 (1960): 235-55.

<sup>20</sup> Condillac, 210. As opposed to other instances, for example 81 below, where I read pain as the trigger for movement, and hence the interruption of stillness.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 240-1.

not unlike the petrifying gaze of Medusa. The stationary inanimate is suddenly analogous to a pained body, deeply paralysed in fear. *It dare not move*. Such an assumption throws new light on the symptoms of animation that characterise the miraculous images discussed previously: bleeding, sweating, weeping, etc.. It is as though, to paraphrase Kenneth Gross, the signs of life take on the form of a wound.<sup>23</sup> Had the initial positioning of the statue been paralysing enough, “movement would have ceased to be a pleasure for it and it would have remained immobile.”<sup>24</sup> The pedestal, or any other similar confining trap, could be said to be what causes the sculpture’s inanimatedness, and it is only the placing of the statue in a liberating environment that enables animation. Fortunately for Condillac’s statue, its encouraging environment helps it to eventually forget the initial pain and desire to move again. Little by little, the statue acquires dreams, ideas, imagination, memory, it sleeps and reawakens.

This philosophical reflection on a statue feeling itself all over, experiencing itself and subsequently the external world, undoubtedly influenced Condillac’s contemporary and lifelong friend Jean Jacques Rousseau in his stage adaptation of *Pygmalion*, first produced in Lyon in 1772. Condillac’s statue’s tactile self-recognition “this is me, this is me again,”<sup>25</sup> is clearly echoed in Rousseau’s monodrama. Although for the most part the focus is on the trembling voice of the restless and unhappy *Pygmalion* lost in longing, in the final scene the animation of *Galatée* (as she is christened by Rousseau) takes place from within. The stage directions shift from being inside his volatile mood swings, to his spectatorship of the sculpture, and finally her unmodulated movements and monotone self-perception.

*Il se tetourne & voit la statue se mouvoir & descendre elle-même les gradins... (Galathée se touche.)*

GALATHÉE. Moi.

PYGMALION *transporté*. Moi!

GALATHÉE *se touchant encore*. C’est moi.

... (*Galathée fait quelques pas & touche un marbre.*) Ce n’est plus moi.<sup>26</sup>

Marie Sallé’s undescriptive “astonishment” is here verbally translated into a choreography of hands touching, punctuated by the “moi” of revelation. Like Sallé, she descends from the immobilising pedestal, an essential step into animation; unlike Sallé, she does so of her own accord, without the guiding hand of *Pygmalion*, yet another sign of a certain interiorisation of the sculpture’s autonomy. Once off the marble she can touch it as distinct from herself, no longer “moi.” The fourth touch reaches out to *Pygmalion*, who guides her hand to his heart

<sup>23</sup> Gross, 86.

<sup>24</sup> Condillac, 241.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

ecstatically, to which she says, once more, “Ah! encore moi...”<sup>27</sup> We have a little more insight into her body and soul, but it is still Pygmalion who steals the limelight in his state of histrionic theatricality. His over-activity fills in the gap left by her unbearable inactivity, immobility and silence. For there is a durational snag in staging statues. If the audience are immobilised in their viewing seats, the stage must offer some form of commotion before the audience turn upon themselves in patterns of disquiet.<sup>28</sup> When the sculpture is still on its pedestal, the audience is free to move around it, getting closer to afford a more detailed view, or further to consider the overall impression. *Either spectator or spectacle is stilled*,<sup>29</sup> unless the duration is condensed to epitomise both conditions, in which case both spectator and spectacle are dead-locked until one or the other shifts. Such is the setting of the tableau vivant, taking us away from animation toward de-animation.

Tableaux vivants cannot last longer than a few seconds or minutes at the most, unless they are returned to a state of “tableaux morts,” as it were, painted, sculpted or photographed back into durable stillness.<sup>30</sup> The living body enacting the sculpture or painting suffers inactivity and confinement, it tingles, twitches, itches, blinks, aches. To enact a tableau vivant is to sustain stillness for as long as possible, until the body melts from stiffness back into flexibility, imparting the impression of animation, which in truth is only the after-effect of intense de-animation (without dying). Perhaps, to follow Steven Connor, “petrification is sovereign against putrefaction,”<sup>31</sup> the *pose* becomes a *pause* in the general process of ageing, dying, disintegrating. The tableau vivant might be read as a self-imposed incorruption, like the incorrupt cadavers of chapter 1, rigidifying oneself in order to one day reawaken in resurrection – “hardening suggests not just fatality but survival.”<sup>32</sup> The difference lies in the endurance test that is the tableau, whereas the incorrupt cadaver is a painless and perfumed death. The pain Condillac refers to as causing immobility becomes here the pain of the body confined to immobility. Think of the street theatre of living statues, waiting for an unknowing passer-by to startle whilst easing the body into the next tableau, or grateful for the coins which bail it

<sup>26</sup> Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Pygmalion: Scène Lyrique* (Geneve: 1771), performed in Geneva, Marchands de Musique, and Lyon, Sieur Castaud, Place de la Comédie, 13.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>28</sup> An example that comes to mind is Sharon Lockhart's film “Teatro Amazonas” (1999), where the camera turns on the patterns of the discomfort of an audience seated in a Brazilian opera house twitching and fidgeting as a minimalist choir sings offstage. On the patterns of attention in Lockhart's work cf. Norman Bryson's “Sharon Lockhart: from Form to Flux,” *Parachute* 103 (2001): 86-106.

<sup>29</sup> This is a generalisation, although even when challenged by forms of performance-trajectories or walk-alongs which disrupt the usual structures of viewing and mobility/immobility, unavoidably there remains some type of ‘framing’ of the scene to be viewed, and hence ‘focusing’ of the viewer's gaze as distinct from the periphery.

<sup>30</sup> The parallels between tableaux posing and photo posing are self-evident. For a very literal conflation, see Quentin Bajac, *Tableaux Vivants: Fantaisies Photographiques Victoriennes (1840-1880)*, Musée d'Orsay 1 March - 6 June 1999 (Paris: Editions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1999). Cf. also Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. R. Howard (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1981). A contemporary take on such layerings of tableaux into two dimensional image are the photos of Hiroshi Sugimoto reproducing wax effigies which in turn are often modelled on a painting (for example the portraits of Henry VIII and his wives), thus looped as it were in an infinite “tableau mort.”

<sup>31</sup> Steven Connor, “Fascination, Skin and the Screen,” *Critical Quarterly* 40, 1 (1998): 9-24, 13.

out of one restricted position into the next. A curious negotiation of the gaze is acted out: if you walk past me without acknowledging my stillness, I will move my stillness to stop you in your steps, immobilise you in a jerk of fright; if you recognise my stillness, pay me and I will change positions, move only to reiterate my stillness for your gaze only. Standing still can petrify.

In his journey to Italy, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe describes the spectacle enacted by Emma Hart, companion to Sir William Hamilton, the English Ambassador in Naples, whom she eventually married in 1791. This young lady is thought to be the originator of the late eighteenth - early nineteenth century tableaux vivants mania. She would enact the stillness of a statue or painting for her admiring future spouse, sustaining each pose or "attitude," as hers were termed, long enough for the viewer to absorb her in, unravel the *mise-en-âbime*, the multiplied view of the living, breathing Emma, the painting or sculpture she was posing as, and the mythological, biblical or historical scene the image represented.<sup>33</sup> Once these various discernments were grasped, she could shift into the next tableau. This condensed view of original, prototype, and copy had to be pried apart, stratified by the erudite observer. The duration of the tableau was thus prescribed by the process of recognition, not only by physical stamina. Or perhaps, to recall Benjamin, the fleeting rhythm of the tableau vivant is due to a newfound propensity toward replication, by nature impermanent: "Uniqueness and permanence are as closely linked to [the original image] as are transitoriness and reproducibility [to the reproduction or copy]."<sup>34</sup> In a complex oxymoron, the living-body-cum-inanimate-image can only sustain the permanence of the unique original image for short lengths before lapsing back into the presentness of its own individuality (unlike the incorrupt cadaver which is its own everlasting original). Overcome by object-hood, the poser's own presence suspends animation, holds its breath until it can do so no more and must return. One of the most palpable novelties in this form of presenting the body as a statue, apparently inaugurated by Lady Hamilton, is indeed this process of iconographic identification. Enactments of Galatea did not, as far as I can gather, refer specifically to an existing inanimate object or iconography, nor does Condillac's statue evoke an explicit pose, character, or even gender.<sup>35</sup> Here, on the other hand, the original retracts into the copy, bringing closer to the flesh the image, whilst she

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<sup>32</sup> Gross, 19.

<sup>33</sup> This 'x' as 'y' formula was a well-established tradition in portraiture, particularly in the work of Joshua Reynolds in England, where portrait painting was almost indistinct from subject painting. Cf. Martin Postle, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: The Subject Pictures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>34</sup> Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 217. One might argue against Benjamin that the more one reproduces something, the more likely that one exemplar will escape the ravages of time. I have equated the tableau vivant with the "mechanically" reproduced photograph, whereby the original image loses its uniqueness and aura through its reproduction. The paradox or inadequacy of the comparison lies in the fact that the poser is truly present and unique in his/her animatedness, and could theoretically return the gaze that is being denied through reproduction.

<sup>35</sup> Annette Michelson claims in parenthesis that Condillac's statue "was greek, no doubt." "On the Eve of the Future: The Reasonable Facsimile and the Philosophical Toy." *October* 29 (1984): 3-20, 19.

herself withdraws into the distance. Another novelty is that this sculptural enactment was not at the service of another greater narrative, nor did it necessarily require the distracting figure of a distraught discomposed Pygmalion to orchestrate the gaze toward the figure's stillness through the restlessness of his yearning. Finally, perhaps the most important innovation in this form of statue posing is the lack of animation. There is no climactic spellbinding instant in which she comes to life, but rather the strange moments in which she switches off, glazes over, becomes the image. It is not the release but the imprisonment that is enacted. The passage is not so much from inert lifelessness to fluttering mobility, but the transitions from one pose to the next, either aborted by the abrupt intervention of a curtain, or gradually metamorphosing as imperceptibly as possible from one stillness to the next. *The sculpture never actually comes to life*, it merely becomes another statue. Paradoxically, it may seem, I would read this as one of the first instances of statuary liberation, no longer at the service of a narrative pygmalionist yearning. The spell is finally undone when the performance ends. Goethe's account of Emma's performance from March 1787 is evocative of the catalogue of artworks on display:

Sir William Hamilton, who still resides here as the English Ambassador, has now, after long years of fancying art and studying nature, found the culmination of all his joy in art and nature in a beautiful girl. He has her living with him, an Englishwoman about twenty years old. She is very lovely and has a good figure. He has had a Grecian costume made for her that suits her to perfection, and she lets her hair down, takes a few shawls, and varies her postures, gestures, expressions, etc. until at last the onlooker really thinks he is dreaming. In her movements and surprising variety one sees perfected what so many thousands of artists would have liked to achieve. Standing, kneeling, sitting, lying, grave, sad, roguish, wanton, penitent, enticing, menacing, fearful, etc., one follows upon the other and from the other. She knows how to choose and change the folds of her veil to set off each expression, and makes herself a hundred different headdresses with the same cloths. The old knight holds the light for the performance and has devoted himself heart and soul to this art object. He sees in her all the antiquities, all the beautiful profiles on Sicilian coins, even the *Apollo Belvedere* itself. This much is certain, it is unique entertainment! We have already enjoyed it on two evenings. Tomorrow morning Tischbein will paint her.<sup>36</sup>

It is telling in Goethe's description how much her attitude posing was a response to Sir William's enthusiasm, but there are more interesting readings to be found than her victimisation to the male gaze.<sup>37</sup> Curiously, although most witnesses and scholars tend to read

<sup>36</sup> Goethe's entry from Caserta, March 16 1787, in *Italian Journey*, 170-171.

<sup>37</sup> This is the prevailing reading of the practice of tableaux vivants, which although partly true, seems somewhat reductive and does not account for the more varied performances of living statues enacted by men, as I will discuss below. Most of these readings follow from Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," and John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, in which women are constructed as passive objects to be seen by a male gaze. See Mary Chapman, "Living Pictures, Women and Tableaux Vivants in Nineteenth Century American Fiction and Culture," *Wide Angle* 18, 3 (1996): 22-52; Robert M. Lewis, "Tableaux Vivants: Parlor Theatricals in Victorian America," *Revue Française d'Études Américaines* 36 (1988): 280-291; Jennie A. Kassanoff, "Extinction, Taxidermy, Tableaux Vivants:

her attitudes as prompted by Hamilton, she, not he, is credited with the original invention of this form of posing. Her imitation of Classical antiquity is fascinating inasmuch as this is the predominant imagery imitated, from Sallé well into the nineteenth century. Not only statuary served as inspiration; vase painting,<sup>38</sup> the ancient paintings of Pompeii and even modern neoclassical works were also sources of imitation. Unaccountably, alongside the (male?) profiles on coins, Goethe evokes (through the eyes of William Hamilton, who in turn spotlights Emma) the masculine and semi-naked sculpture of the Apollo Belvedere.<sup>39</sup> Disparate images project onto her like a slide-show, she crystallises each image only briefly, and can adopt any persona, remaining herself intact. And just as she emulates works of art, in a complex permutation of copies and originals, she is then captured in paintings reproducing her attitudes. Lady Hamilton was a popular artist's model already in her youth, posing for George Romney as Circe, Sybil, Saint Cecilia, Lady Macbeth, and so forth, and became even more in demand as a result of her statue-posing, later portrayed by women artists such as Angelica Kauffman and Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun. The artist's model was colonizing not only the theatre but also the artwork.

It is relatively self-explanatory that images of antiquity should feature at length in such erudite forms of elitist entertainment, but what stands out is the elaboration of costume, the use of the veil as sculptural element which both hides and renders visible each attitude. Holström speculates that Emma was inspired by the practice in sculptor's studios of covering clay models so as to keep them damp or perhaps to conceal the unfinished work from inquisitive eyes. She also relates it to Rousseau's *Pygmalion*, where the removal of the veil which conceals the statue of Galatea is an effective dramatic gesture.<sup>40</sup> This implies at once a form of (creative, not necessarily sexual) voyeurism, protection resulting from vulnerability, and the climactic revelation of something finite, concluded, self-standing. Veiled drapery continued to characterise the performance of statuary, and instigated in part the eventual indignation at the revelation of too much flesh. The ideal of the naked body was warranted in representation,

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Staging Race and Class in *The House of Mirth*," *PMLA* 115, 1 (2000): 60-74; Robin Veder, "Tableaux Vivants: Performing Art, Purchasing Status," *Theatre Annual: A Journal of Performance Studies* 48 (1995): 14-29; Gail Marshall, *Actresses on the Victorian Stage: Feminine Performance and the Galatea Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Marshall in particular discusses the Victorian actress in her negotiation with statuesque metaphors, as a visual/sexual commodity. She claims the Galatea-aesthetic was only later contested by actresses such as Ellen Terry through models of autobiography (coincidentally the mother of Edward Gordon Craig to whom chapter 6 is dedicated).

<sup>38</sup> David Nolte suggests that the iconography of the portraits of Emma in her attitudes animate the vases by changing profile into three-quarters, "Consequently, a particular vase painting, seen or remembered in conjunction with the living Emma's interpretation of it, becomes the starting point of an action completed in time, the overall impression being that of a diptych unfolding cinematically and in three dimensions." "The Body of the Collector and the Collected Body in William Hamilton's Naples," *Eighteenth Century Studies* 31, 1 (1997): 108-114, 112.

<sup>39</sup> Emma's apparent cross-dressing fits in with Marjorie Garber's notion of transvestism as proper to theatrical performance (*Vested Interests*), and also characterises later tableaux (see below). Furthermore, it is unclear whether the statue of the Apollo she emulated was in its fragmented or restored form, in which case she would have been literally "fleshing out" the broken hands like a statuary relic or prosthesis.

<sup>40</sup> Kirsten Gram Holström, *Monodrama, Attitudes, Tableaux Vivants: Studies on some Trends of Theatrical Fashion, 1770-1815* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1967), 115.

but unacceptable in presentation. At the same time, the body's stillness authorizes more exposure than the moving body.<sup>41</sup>

From another perspective, the veil would appear to function parallel to the pedestal, in that it frames the image, allows it to set as the ethereal billowing solidifies into a sculpture-like composition. One can imagine its final draping as the moment the poser solidifies as 'image' when all movement has been deflated, a skin-like stole that settles over the ossified body. The tableau is incomplete without a framing device of some sort or another. Several months later, in May 1787, Goethe describes the set-up used by the Hamiltons when Emma enacted paintings, rather than sculptures. He tells of how Sir William took them down to a secret vault where he saw an open-fronted box painted black inside and surrounded by a gold frame big enough to take a person standing upright. They were told that Sir William's mistress used to pose in brightly coloured costumes in simulation of ancient paintings from Pompeii, or even modern masterworks.<sup>42</sup> It is clear that the silent picture requires a partition to segregate it from the flow of everyday life, to draw the focus to it as framed stillness, trapped movement. This is the significance of the pedestal from which Galatea descends: she ceases to belong to the plane of immobile sculpture and joins the ebb and flow of lively movement. The frame must isolate and enclose the image from the rest of its surroundings. The tableau realises to perfection Diderot's emphasis on the proscenium, his advice to actors that they imagine a wall across the front of the stage dividing them from the audience, enabling them to ignore the spectators as if the curtain had not risen; the poser does not see his/her audience, the audience watch without being seen. As Roland Barthes writes: "The tableau (pictorial, theatrical, literary) is a pure cut-out segment with clearly defined edges, irreversible and incorruptible; everything that surrounds it is banished into nothingness, remains unnamed, while everything that it admits within its field is promoted into essence, into light, into view."<sup>43</sup> The tableau must be perceivable in one effortless glance, absorbable in one bite, from one position of spectatorship, in a short amount of time, just enough to etch itself in one's memory. This temporal diminution corresponds to a distortion of scale: even though the tableau performer is life-size, the pedestal or frame removes him/her from human scale by elevating and/or entrapping, achieving a distancing effect through a filtering of height or depth. Diderot wrote of the perfect play in terms of a succession of tableaux,<sup>44</sup> almost like a gallery or an exhibition.

<sup>41</sup> As evident in more recent forms of stilled entertainment at the Windmill Theatre in London or the Folies Bergère in Paris.

<sup>42</sup> Goethe, entry from Naples, May 27, 1787, in *Italian Journey*, 261-2. This second entry concludes with his disenchantment with Lady Hamilton's insipid performances, particularly in light of the fact that she lacks vocal qualities in her singing. Her beauty does not compensate for her lack of talent, and Goethe finds her silent posing vulgarly common compared to the rarity of a "pleasant speaking voice."

<sup>43</sup> Roland Barthes, "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein," *Image, Music, Text*, trans. S. Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), 69-78, 70.

<sup>44</sup> Indeed, as in Garrick, the frozen theatrical pose would serve as the culmination of a play, but remains distinct from the tableau vivant as emulation of a painting. Denis Diderot, "Entretiens sur le fils Naturel," *Œuvres: Esthétique-Théâtre*, vol. 4 (Paris: Robert Lafont, 1996), 1132-1190; Cf. Jay Caplan, *Framed Narratives: Diderot's*

Each scene epitomises the narrative moment, contains the present as well as a bit of the before and a bit of the after, it is the “pregnant moment” Lessing refers to in his *Laocoon*. But unlike the statue or painting, the living human body is a weak carrier of such condensed narrative, it cannot sustain the past/present/future (nor, perhaps, the copy) for much longer than a few minutes.

Hence in the tableau vivant one crystallised instant morphs into the next in serial discontinuity, with no necessary connection between them other than that of a body changing pose,<sup>45</sup> which might eventually become dance. Susan Sontag fictionalises Emma’s attitudes as a non-dance in which the body is loose to float up, drift down, settle in a “flurry of grimaces, tightening of tendons, stiffening of hands, head rocketing back or to the side, sharp intake of breath. [...] But don’t move. Don’t... move. This is not dance. You are not a proto-Isadora Duncan in freeze frame, for all your bare feet and Greek Costume and loose limbs and unbound hair. Illustrate the passion. But as a statue.”<sup>46</sup> Neither dance nor theatre. This short-lived pregnant moment of narrative has no need to develop further, rewind nor fast-forward, for it contains the entire story itself. The Comtesse de Boigne, who was far from being an admirer of Emma, could not help but praise her attitudes. Her description of a performance is illuminating in that it details the method of framing with the shawl, the audience reaction, as well as the experience of being within a tableau, something Lady Hamilton did not impart.

She threw a shawl over her head which reached the ground and covered her entirely, and thus hidden, draped herself with the other shawls. Then she suddenly raised the covering, either throwing it off entirely or half raising it, and making it form part of the drapery of the model which she represented. But she always appeared as a statue of most admirable design...

I have sometimes acted with her as a subordinate figure to form a group. She used to place me in the proper position, and arrange my draperies before raising the shawl, which served as a

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*Genealogy of the Beholder* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986). On tableaux in Diderot, see Phoebe von Held, *Alienation and Theatricality in Diderot and Brecht*, diss. Slade, UCL, 2001.

<sup>45</sup> An interesting comparison to make would be the early photographic studies of a body walking, or running, or dancing, such as those of Muybridge or Marey taken almost 100 years later in the late nineteenth century. If in those sequential images a choreography of movement gradually surfaces, what is the dance that might unfold in a series of tableaux vivants? It remains somehow un- (or pre-) cinematic, un-visualisable, or perhaps simply unimportant to the main focus of attention (being the still poses, not the movement caught in between). If in the kinetic visualisation of photography instances of movement previously invisible to the naked eye are exposed, here almost the opposite takes place as movement itself is posed, whilst the transitions are rendered imperceptibly, uncaptured into stillness.

<sup>46</sup> Susan Sontag, *The Volcano Lover: A Romance* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992), 145-146. Interestingly, on the one hand Sontag emphasises Emma Hart’s objecthood in the Cavaliere’s (Sir William’s) collection, but on the other she states that she is not a victim, that she is not only a work of art or a model but also an artist (p. 149). Cf. Brigitte Peucker, “Looking and Touching: Spectacle and Collection in Sontag’s *Volcano Lover*,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 11, 1 (1998): 159-165; Stacy Olster, “Remakes, Outtakes, and Updates in Susan Sontag’s *The Volcano Lover*,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 41, 1 (1995): 117-139. The comparison with Isadora Duncan is an apposite one, as we shall see in chapter 6. Coincidentally, Duncan’s first performing role was in (but not as) *Mme. Pygmalion*, a pantomime starring Jane May (1895). Dorée Duncan et al (eds.), *Life Into Art: Isadora Duncan and Her World* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), 32. Ann Daly notes that Duncan was surely influenced by the practice of living statues. “The Natural Body,” *Moving History/Dancing Cultures*, 288-99, 294.



curtain enveloping us both. My fair hair contrasted with her magnificent black hair, to which many of her effects were due.

One day she placed me on my knees before an urn, with my hands together in an attitude of prayer. Leaning over me, she seemed lost in grief, and both of us had our hair dishevelled. Suddenly rising and moving backward a little, she grasped me by the hair with a movement so sudden that I turned round in surprise and almost in fright, which brought me precisely into the spirit of my part, for she was brandishing a dagger. The passionate applause of the artists who were looking on resounded with exclamations of "Brava, Medea!" Then drawing me to her and clasping me to her breast as though she were fighting to preserve me from the anger of Heaven, she evoked loud cries of "Viva, la Niobe!"

She took her inspiration from the antique statues, and without making any servile copy of them, recalled them to the poetical imagination of the Italians by improvised gesture. Others have tried to imitate Lady Hamilton's talent, but I doubt if anyone has succeeded. It is a business in which there is but a step from the sublime to the ridiculous. Moreover, to equal her success, the actor must be first of faultless beauty from head to foot, and such perfection is rare.<sup>47</sup>

There is an element of surprise in the sudden throwing off of the veil, as if to heighten the effect of the body's solid stillness contrasted with the swiftness of a floating membrane. Hair functions almost as an additional veil that settles into pose, as a mode of wearing or un-wearing the costume. But more importantly, there is the surprise of the Comtesse, who from within her static pose is caught unaware by a sudden movement of liveness that causes immobilised fright (for she clearly does not move away). Her fear is appropriate to her role, as she learns from the audience's cry of recognition. From this position of a furious Medea about to murder her child – identified by the audience and therefore perishable – Emma transforms into a protective Niobe, herself immobilised into stone according to mythology. This latter iconography is a remarkable instance of the reverse-Galatea narrative, in which Emma's solidification, although representing the moment prior to Niobe's punishment, expands into her mourning for the death of her children as well as into the aftermath of her petrification. In his art-historical statuo-philia, Johannes J. Winckelmann had earlier described Niobe and her daughters as paralysed "in that state of indescribable fear where feeling is numbed and stifled and the present threat of death takes away all capacity to think; in the fable of Niobe an image of this lifeless fear is given by her metamorphosis into stone... Such a state of mind, where feeling and thought cease... produces no alteration in the shape or form of facial feature."<sup>48</sup> (Garrick had described the same effect in theatrical terms, stating that Macbeth's fear caused a

<sup>47</sup> Hugh Tours, *The Life and Letters of Emma Hamilton* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963), 91.

<sup>48</sup> Johannes J. Winckelmann cited in Alex Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 137. Timothy J. McNiven points out that fear in Greek art is a specifically gendered (feminine) gamut of emotions, as that which is identified with the non-Man. "Fear and Gender in Greek Art," *Reading the Body: Representations and Remains in the Archaeological Record*. Ed. Alison E. Rautman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 124-131.

kind of spasmodic paralysis of the limbs, making the actor “a moving statue, or indeed a petrified man.”<sup>49</sup>) Fear itself deadens the body into impassive stone.



9. Greek statue of Daughter of Niobe, 5<sup>th</sup> century.

The Comtesse as child remains within the tableau, unknowing, blind but sentient, invisible to herself as both statue and iconography. She is positioned by Lady Hamilton, but must decipher her stage manager's gestures as much as her own. Indeed, in the following century the practice of the tableau vivant evolved into the game of charades, as though the essence of the performance of stillness were guesswork.<sup>50</sup> More than reading the image as an instant of petrification, it implies a reading of the pregnant narrative background to that petrification, or a locating of the formal and iconographic qualities of that particular immobilisation. Perhaps because it is still, trapped within a frame that excludes movement, it creates a suction, and absorbs into it other possible references. The “sublime” or “ridiculous” (to quote the Comtesse de Boigne) absurdity of the living statue, its theatrical paucity, projects outward, drawing in borrowed narratives from elsewhere.

Which is why the elaboration of interiority from within the statue-pose becomes so effective, particularly when it does not necessarily coincide with the actual scene represented. Holström claims that the craze for tableaux vivants of the nineteenth century stems from the scenes depicted in Goethe's novel *Elective Affinities*, published in 1809.<sup>51</sup> He obviously integrated Lady Hamilton's performances into his conjecture that the “living pictures” had originated from the Nativity groups, the *presepe* scenes he had seen in Naples. Thus, he poses Ottilie's

<sup>49</sup> David Garrick, *Essay on acting*. Cited in Roach, 90.

<sup>50</sup> The practice of tableaux vivants, like the iconographic images emulated, was highly reliant on rhetorical gesture, borrowing from the repertoire of preaching, politicking, etc..

<sup>51</sup> Holström, 209-233.

character as the Holy Mother in a tableau vivant of the Nativity, complete with a real baby boy as the infant Jesus:

Fortunately the baby had fallen asleep in a graceful position, so that nothing distracted the onlookers from their contemplation of the mother, who, with infinitely gentle grace, lifted a veil to reveal her hidden treasure. The picture seemed to have been caught just at this moment... Otilie's whole appearance, her gesture, the expression of her face and eyes surpassed anything ever conveyed by a painter. Any connoisseur of art, seeing this spectacle, would have feared that some details might change; and he would have doubted whether anything could ever give him such enjoyment again. Unfortunately, no one present was capable of grasping the complete effect. Only the Architect who, as a tall, slender shepherd, peered from the side over the heads of the kneeling figures, had, to some degree, an impression of the whole; and even he, standing where he was, was not afforded a complete view...<sup>52</sup>

The infant Jesus sleeps, his slumbering stillness being, on the one hand, the object of attention which Otilie, the mother, unveils, and on the other, the object that might distract from her act of unveiling. The picture has been captured at this instant, and, clearly precarious in its suspended stillness, must be sucked in by the keen art connoisseur before it changes pose. Unfortunately, there is no one to experience the whole, the ideal viewpoint, except for a participant in the actual tableau, the architect/shepherd who devised the composition and from his extra height affords some view of the total effect. Goethe moves effortlessly from the outside to the inside of the tableau, between the viewer and the viewed. After the curtain falls to let the actors relax into the next tableau, a new spectator arrives among the audience, and Otilie recognises him as her tutor at school: "Her eyes filled with tears, while she forced herself to remain motionless. With great relief she felt the baby move; and the Architect had given the sign for the lowering of the curtain."<sup>53</sup> The tableau vivant becomes a form of imprisonment from which Otilie's tears can only stream while the rest of her body is forced into stiffness. She cannot even see the baby move, but only feel it from her own pose. She can however see the tutor, and this sight is the cause for animation (or rather the undoing of her de-animation). Goethe is undoubtedly tapping into legendary miracles of crying statues of the Virgin, a clear sign of the animation of the image. He also references the well-known anecdote of St. Francis re-enacting the nativity and bringing the infant to life, arousing it from "deep

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<sup>52</sup> Goethe, *Elective Affinities*, trans. E. Mayer and L. Bogan (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1963), 199. Earlier in the novel Luciane, another female character, poses in a series of tableaux vivants representing the paintings of *Belisarius* by Van Dyck, *Ahasuerus and Esther* by Rubens, and *Paternal Warning* by Ter Borch. In this latter example Goethe describes the poser's repressed reaction to audience enthusiasm as follows: "The evidently embarrassed daughter did not move, and did not allow the audience to see the expression of her face; the father remained seated and kept to his admonishing gesture; and the mother removed neither her nose nor her eyes from the transparent glass in which the wine never diminished although she seemed to drink." (p. 188). Sustaining the stillness is an intense exercise in self-control. Another major literary example of tableaux vivants, which there is little space for in this context, is in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

sleep," as we saw earlier. Here, however, rather than being the inaugural moment of theatre, the awakening movement becomes the interruption, the cue for the re-veiling of the tableau.<sup>54</sup> Animation is aborted, for in this particular spectacle it would undo rather than substantiate belief.

Although women appear to be the privileged species to enact the neoclassical beauty of sculptural stillness, they were not by any means the only performers of tableaux vivants. Many male performers enjoyed success and popularised the genre, dressed as scantily as their female counterparts. Andrew Ducrow, a British performer known primarily for his acrobatic horsemanship (he performed his first *pose plastiques* on horses!), toured "The Living Statue, or Model of Antiques" from as early as 1828 in the UK and later in America. In it he performed a Dying Gladiator, Hercules throwing Lysimachus into the sea (from Canova's chisel), Romulus (from David's Pictures of the Sabines), and so forth. The intention was clearly to associate such a performance with art and instruction, and as such it was received. In 1828 a German traveller, Prince Pückler-Muskau, wrote of Ducrow's "ennobled" tableaux:

When the curtain draws up, you see a motionless statue on a lofty pedestal in the centre of the stage. This is Ducrow; and it is hardly credible how an elastic dress can fit so exquisitely and so perfectly represent marble, only here and there broken by a bluish vein. He appeared first as the Hercules Farnese. With the greatest skill and precision he then gradually quitted his attitude from one gradation to another, of display of strength; but at the moment in which he presented a perfect copy of the most celebrated statues of antiquity, he suddenly became fixed as if changed to marble... This man must be an admirable model for painters and sculptors: his form faultless, and he can throw himself into any attitude with the utmost ease and grace. It struck me how greatly our unmeaning dancing might be ennobled, if something like what I have described were introduced, instead of the absurd and vulgar hopping and jumping with which we are now entertained.<sup>55</sup>

Ducrow appears to be in a state of constant shape-shifting which crystallises only for a few precious seconds, when it reaches a recognisable shape. For the German Prince, the peripheral movements of this stillness could evolve into a possible form of dance. Hopping and jumping would slow down to a series of poses solidly rooted to the ground.<sup>56</sup> He resembles marble not

<sup>54</sup> Goethe's attraction to statuesque enactment is epitomised in his monodrama *Proserpina*, produced in Weimar in 1814, which combined both attitudes and tableaux vivants. Reversing the performance of statuary by Galatea, Goethe contrasts Proserpina's violent movements to Pluto's petrified kingdom, where she is drawn to this dead world and stiffens into immobility, becoming one of the living-dead beings of the *tableau*. Goethe, "Proserpina, a Monodrama," *Early Verse Drama and Prose Plays*, eds. C. Hamlin and F. Ryder, trans. R. Browning (New York: Suhrkamp Publishers, 1988), 273-280.

<sup>55</sup> A.H. Saxon, *The Life and Art of Andrew Ducrow & the Romantic Age of the English Circus* (Connecticut: Archon Books, 1978), 152. On other male performers see Altick, *The Shows of London*, 342-9.

<sup>56</sup> In fact, Hillel Schwartz views mime as the culmination of the seamless silent slideshow of tableaux vivants. *The Culture of the Copy* (New York: Zone, 1996), 66-69; and "Torque: The New Kinaesthetic of the Twentieth Century," *Incorporations*, eds. J. Crary and S. Kwinter (New York: Zone, 1992), 71-127, 97-102.

only in his motionlessness, but also in the colour of his skin, covered in white to hide the veins of flesh. The illusion must be complete. The quotation of the sculpture's pose is no longer enough, the surface must also coincide with the inanimate stone. Ducrow becomes the sculpture to the extent that his changing pose is almost surprising. According to a reviewer of his later and more complex exhibition of tableaux, *Raphael's Dream, or The Mummy and Study of Living Pictures*: "The resemblance is so correct, so true to Nature, that when the figure moves the effect is magical, and we see it with a surprise which it is difficult to describe a statue start to life."<sup>57</sup> His de-animation is so complete that any sign of movement is unexpected, quasi-miraculous. Such secular enchantments echo the miraculous animation of images, implying an all too willing desire to suspend secular disbelief. But as with Lady Hamilton, we see both the living and the dead statue, the poser and the posed, as well as all the future and past paintings and sculptures that flow forth from this interplay.<sup>58</sup> Here, *consubstantiated* (cf. chapter 2) perception seems to enable the double vision of the one body "in, with, and under" the substance of the other.

In England tableaux vivants had caused much less furore than in New York, where nudity became a censured and controversial issue. The edifying purpose was replaced with the focus on scantily-clad performers enacting a form of mild striptease.<sup>59</sup> The aesthetic, moral and didactic value of statue-posing conforming to the original prototype was giving way to the titillating sight of the actual fleshly body of the performer, which had become too visible, not quotational or "veiled" enough. The performer was not transparent enough in evoking narratives other than those of her own body, nor was the pose sufficiently framed to become differentiated from real life. In 1848, the impropriety of such performances caused police raids and arrests, inaugurating the censorial up-and-down of tableaux vivants popularity. In the 1890s, one of the less controversial moments of the history of tableaux vivants, a Hungarian by the name of Edward Kilanyi (who in addition to touring America also toured Berlin, Paris, London, Spain) devised a novel mode of presentation. Rather than have each scene divided by a curtain, Kilanyi introduced revolving stages so that the scenes could rotate and dissolve from one to the next extremely quickly, becoming almost cinematographic. But even more ingenious was his method of exhibiting the Venus de Milo. Ever true to the original, the fragmentary icon is impersonated through illusory mutilation, and it was reported that "the arms of the woman personating the armless figure were draped in sleeves of the same colour

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<sup>57</sup> Saxon, 228-9.

<sup>58</sup> Bizarrely, on several occasions in the late 1800s this confusing proliferation of copies prompted the owners of the copyright of images to sue theatres as they felt that profit was being gained from pictures they did not own.

<sup>59</sup> For the censorship of tableaux vivants see Jack W. McCullough, *Living Pictures on the New York Stage* (Essex: Bowker Publishing Company, 1981). On later instances of censorship of nudity in performance, see Angela J. Latham, "The Right to Bare: Containing and Encoding American women in Popular Entertainments of the 1920s." *Theatre Journal* 49 (1997): 455-73.

and texture as the background. The illusion was so perfect as well-nigh to defy detection.<sup>60</sup> Unlike the aforementioned statuary relics which fleshed out the lacking body parts, here the intact body retracts into torso. Lady Hamilton had no need to paint herself white or eclipse a limb, but theatrical illusion was becoming more and more imperative to the tableau vivant. Audiences not only wanted to reconfirm their knowledge of narrative imagery by guessing the riddle of the statue; they wanted to recuperate something of pre-Enlightenment belief, to experience astonishment rather than scepticism, suspension of disbelief rather than disbelief. This is clearly part of the more general developments in stage illusionism of the nineteenth century. Indeed, illusion was merging costume and skin to the point of disorientation, suggesting at once a tight second skin which could transform the body's tint or shape, or a stillness which made the skin appear so foreign, waxen, and sculptural that it almost resembled armour. Speculations suggest a titillating confusion: "what looks like flesh is in reality wax; the human figures being encased in a species of framework, excepting the head"; the women wear "little more than fleshings, with, in some cases, plaster moulds over the breast"; or "a light sash, a filmy fluttering ribbon of white gauze, that only serve to emphasize the absence of clothing"; "a woman clad only in a garment representing the bare skin... [is] a woman who is impersonating a naked woman..."<sup>61</sup>

In such motionlessness, skin becomes costume, and costume draped skin; elasticity feigns inelasticity. Skin and surfaces were in fact shedding infinite moulds and replicas of themselves throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. One only has to think of the physical process of casting, covering surface with a thin but solid membrane of plaster which could act, as above, as a prosthetic covering, or could offer a new surrogate body. Thus the inanimate statue and the living statue (waiting for the plaster to dry) are impossible to tell apart from underneath the shell. They are both pure opaque *surface*. Might this entrapment be a tangible experience of Condillac's thought experiment? At the apogee of the copious proliferation of plaster casts of originals,<sup>62</sup> statues self-replicated almost like *acheiropoietai*, shedding their skins in order to create new bodies, populating museums and losing their 'aura' of uniqueness in their accessibility. Similarly, humans were replicating through waxworks, and death masks were taken fresh from the deceased (by the likes of Madame Tussaud, to cite the most famous), and subsequently immortalised in tableaux of display.<sup>63</sup> Imagine the excitement when the year of 79AD was captured in bodily poses among the ruins of Pompeii. Bodies

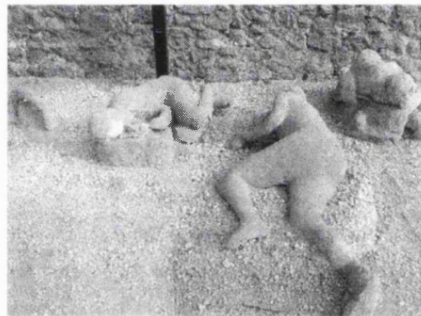
<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 103. Linda Nochlin examines the motif of fragmentation in the visual arts around the same period. *The Body in Pieces: The Fragment as a Metaphor of Modernity* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994).

<sup>61</sup> The Reverend H.C. Shuttleworth, Charles Morton, Frederick A. Atkins and A.W. Pinero, from the symposium "The Living Pictures," *The New Review* 2, 11 (1894): 461-70, 467, 469, 462. Here the question of living pictures is discussed between indecent impropriety and plain entertainment.

<sup>62</sup> On the proliferation of casts from the Renaissance until 1900, cf. Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture 1500-1900* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981).

<sup>63</sup> On waxwork displays see Altick, chapters "Waxwork and Clockwork," 50-63; "The Waxen and the Fleshly," 332-349.

were gradually uncovered, or rather, according to an innovative technique invented by Giuseppe Fiorelli around the 1860s, filled in, their hollows solidified, fleshed out (not unlike the statuary relics referred to in the previous chapters). The ashes covering the dead after the volcanic eruption had hardened, and the bodies had rotted, leaving a hollow mould. Fiorelli poured plaster of paris into these cavities, rendering plaster replicas of the final moments of the dead, copies not of other images but of actual moments of death, of genuine fossilization into statue.<sup>64</sup> The tableaux vivant of human suffering so poignantly represented in the mythical figure of Niobe suddenly spilled into the tableaux of historical truth, and although perhaps the posers were unaware of their re-enactment, their hardened bodies of which one must guess the original can be read as an act of homage to the citizens of Pompeii, an archeological, fossilological conundrum it too requiring reconstruction.



10. Adult and child body casts created using Fiorelli's technique, Pompeii.

Models posing in tableaux vivants in order to become images perhaps endured the stillness inherent to images far longer than the actual performers of tableaux vivants. Elizabeth Butler, a nineteenth-century military painter, describes her male model crumbling under the torturesome suit of armour, occasionally resting in a clatter of release. Likewise a poser in a painting of John Singer Sargeant writes in 1895:

Being but an amateur model, I was easily entrapped into a trying pose, turning as if to walk away, with a general twist of the whole body and all the weight on one foot. Professional models will always try to poise the weight equally on both feet... I managed pretty well on the whole, but the sittings cleared up a point which had long puzzled me: why did models occasionally faint during a long pose without mentioning that they were tired and wanted a rest? One day the answer came to me quite suddenly. I had been standing for over an hour and saw no reason why I should not go on for another hour, when I became aware of a cold wind blowing in my face accompanied by a curious 'going' at the knees. I tried to ask for a rest, but

<sup>64</sup> During the Renaissance ancient sculptures were in fact categorized as fossils, because they too derived from the earth, and oscillated between being considered a product of nature and a creation of man. Horst Bredekamp, *The Lure of Antiquity and the Cult of the Machine: The Kunstkammer and the Evolution of Nature, Art, and Technology*, trans. A. Brown (Princeton: M. Wiener publishers, 1995), 11.

found that my lips were frozen stiff and refused to move. Hundreds of years passed – I suppose about twenty seconds.<sup>65</sup>

The poser proves incapable of sustaining the image he is about to become, enacting movement whilst immobilised in an imbalance, lacking a pedestalled support. He becomes the durational survival of the image, projected forward several centuries, time expanding through him to the point of vertiginous fainting. Speechless, “entrapped,” he freezes into the portrait he is about to become. The pose proves gradually unsustainable, and once again the image suffers what the human being cannot, scapegoating the animate creature’s inability to stay still. The model returns, overwhelmed by the potential loss of presence.

Indeed, the technique of *successive tableaux vivants* eventually occasioned a method of movement which would have doubtless interested Prince Pückler-Muskau. François Delsarte (1811-1871) devised a system of dramatic expression which used the becoming-statue as a scientific technique. The edifying and ennobled purpose of tableaux vivants systematised in the Delsartian method of movement, which took first France, then America, by storm.<sup>66</sup> In the 1870s, American Delsartianism became almost exclusively a women’s movement, enabling them to liberate their bodies from the constrictions of Victorian society, and greatly informing the birth of American modern dance. Genevieve Stebbins’ major treatise, *The Delsarte System of Expression*, went through six editions between 1885-1902, and the sixth and revised edition included thirty-two full-page reproductions of photographs of classical Greek sculpture. In her “decomposing” exercises, aimed at attaining physical flexibility, she describes the letting fall of the limbs “as if dead.” This leads eventually to the imitation of photographed statues (yet another *mise-en-âbime* of copy and original), ranging from the frieze of the Parthenon, to Pallas Athene, Ariadne, the Fighting Gladiator, and so forth (without the aid of makeup, women posed unproblematically in male roles whilst gowned in female drapery). Between each pose the transitional movement was to be fluid, magnetic, rhythmic; never spasmodic, sudden or hidden (as the veiling in Emma Hamilton’s attitudes). Stebbins concludes: “What is it, child? You would look at the others? Seek some gallery where you will find casts of the antique, and spend a profitable hour in discovering the attitude in which each statue stands. Then go home and essay them before the glass.”<sup>67</sup> From photos to casts to living statues, the proliferation of copies is infinite. But most fascinating is the mirror image of these mirror-images. Sculpture-posing is implied here as a more private activity, no longer necessarily subject to the gaze of an

<sup>65</sup> W. Graham Robertson, himself a painter and illustrator, cited in Borzello, 38.

<sup>66</sup> According to Kassanoff, tableaux vivants duplicated original artworks based in Europe, and thus “high art was democratised to yet another American commodity.” (66). Cf. Veder.

<sup>67</sup> Genevieve Stebbins, *Delsarte System of Dramatic Expression* (New York: Werner, 1886), 72. See also Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter, “The Genteel Transition: American Delsartism,” *Reformers and Visionaries: The Americanization of the Art of Dance* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1979), 17-30; Ruyter, “Antique Longings: Genevieve Stebbins and American Delsartian Performance,” *Corporealities*, ed. S.L. Foster (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 70-89.



audience, but a curious narcissism, an act of ennobled self-portraiture. *The statue looks back.* Looking at oneself become-statue gives rise to a strange configuration of reverse "photography," where the gazer is at once camera and photo, both blind and seeing, temporarily immortalized through temporary immobilisation.



11. Tableau Vivant representing *The Niobe Group*, performed by members of the Boston School of Oratory under the direction of Miss Clara Power Ederly in 1891.

The practice of tableaux vivants is thought to have died out due its theatrical inadequacy, snubbed away from elite parlour theatrics, popular vaudeville and finally to the streets (where it survives today). It was gradually replaced by the melodramas and silent films that mimed the same sentimental gestures in the early twentieth century. Even so, several artists in the last half century have employed it as a technique which challenges questions of art-hood, authorship and quotation. Piero Manzoni signed women decreeing them art objects; with their impassive faces painted, Gilbert and George posed as gentlemanly singing sculptures, slowly shifting positions; Jannis Kounellis combined animate and inanimate in frozen performances; Luigi Ontani and Scott Burton presented tableaux vivants personifying figures from classical paintings or poses from body-language vocabulary. But perhaps the most difficult and inquiring heir to the tableau vivant tradition is the performance work of Vanessa Beecroft:

A uniform army of naked high-heeled women stand in a gallery. Their faces are blank, masked by skin-coloured spheres the shape of a head: featureless, eyeless, their looking is barely discernable through the canvas-like headpiece. They look like the mannequins of a metaphysical De Chirico painting. Some stand facing us, others eventually melt onto the floor, or sink into the gallery's white sofa, the directionality of their 'facing' only vaguely decipherable (a geometric calculation of the sphere's gaze, perhaps). The orderly lines they initially formed gradually disintegrate, and in the re-configurations of their bodies their faces sometimes appear to face a painting, as-if looking, although they seem to be constantly slipping into some other activity. We see them as a living painting or statue, though never quite still enough, a statue engaged in the act of appearing to look without having a gaze.<sup>68</sup>

Of this performance, perhaps the most blatantly iconographic (although others have been loosely based on a Canova, Botticelli or a Pre-Raphaelite painting, using wigs instead of masks), Beecroft claims the inspiration came from De Chirico's painting *Il Ritorno di Ulisse* (1968), where a young man rows a boat inside a furnished room.<sup>69</sup> The models are there to be looked at, whilst they themselves seem to be caught in a strange act of looking-not-looking in relation to both the paintings of the Guggenheim collection that surround them, and the supposed spectators of the performance. In this living picture there is a faint original lurking somewhere, but it is constantly dissolved in a pose that is stretched out until it wanes, the bodies too weak to bear its stillness. Hiring models to pose in the costumes and configurations she masterminds, Beecroft's models appear mostly naked or semi-naked, wearing the signature fetishistic high heels. Her dictums are usually along the lines of 1. do not move; 2. do not talk;

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<sup>68</sup> Based on Beecroft's video and photographic documentation of *VB47*, performed at the Peggy Guggenheim collection in Venice, Italy (June 2001), shown as part of the *Form Follows Fiction* exhibition at Castello Di Rivoli Museum in Turin, Italy, November 2001. I am grateful to Gagosian Gallery who allowed me to view several of the VB series on video.

3. do not interact with the audience, or, as another writer paraphrases: "Don't talk, don't fall down, don't move too fast, don't move too slow... Don't act."<sup>70</sup> The duration of stillness is protracted to its extreme limits, usually lasting for around three hours. Beecroft draws attention to the structures of looking more than to the looker or looked at, forcing her performers as much as her spectators into squirming spectatorship and exhibitionism. This deadlock is situated within an immobility constantly destabilised in awkward non-narrative (and non-iconographic, in the sense of Lady Hamilton) pose-shifting, heightened by the difficult balancing-act of prolonged standing in high heels.<sup>71</sup> Movements become more of a crumbling of a pose than an actual shift in position (or, to use a Kleistian turn of phrase that will feature in chapter 5, the force pulling them down is stronger than the force holding them up, and true standing seems to take place in the midst of falling). In most of her other pieces, the faces are highly visible, some stare vacantly, glazed; others shift their eyes nervously in avoiding eye-contact. Naked and anonymous look-alikes of one another, they appear trapped in the endurance test of a waiting room, an unending tableau vivant that never truly crystallises, never truly stiffens into its iconographic 'original,' if it has one. They start by standing, bodies swaying in the effort of an uprightness rooted in such a small pedestal, a pointed heel. When they tire they crouch, sit, lay on the ground. The tableau eventually wears itself out, disintegrates.<sup>72</sup> We know little of the posers other than what their subtle choreography exposes: defiance, awkward discomfort, embarrassment, fidgety boredom, fatigue or even pain (which might find equivalents in the audience, in addition to fascination, embarrassment, outrage). It is hard to fixate what exactly immobilises; why it does so; whose desire is it gratifying (a male audience? Beecroft? the art world?). More than anything, Beecroft's performances tend to highlight the body's *resistance* to tableaux vivants whilst using it as the framework. Her models constantly sway, stretch, re-adjust, as though there were no ideal shape, no possible stillness or image. The models are constantly 'out of focus,' as it were (though clearly not so in the photographic documentation, which for this very reason betrays

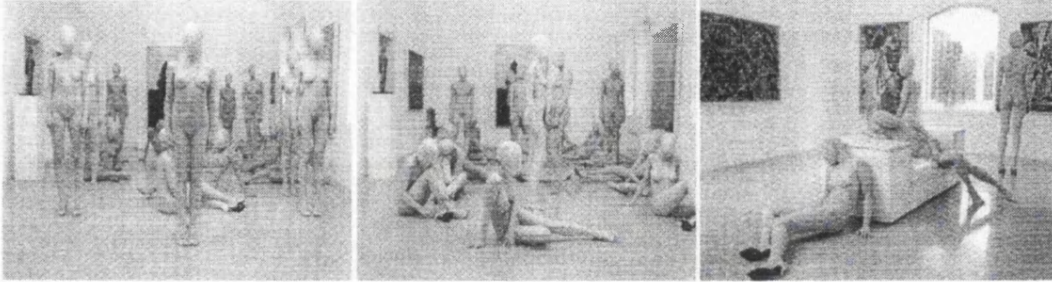
<sup>69</sup> Vanessa Beecroft interview with Massimiliano Tonelli in *Exibart*, published online at <http://www.exibart.com/notizia.asp?IDNotizia=2574&IDCategoria=75> (consulted 20 February 2002).

<sup>70</sup> Collier Schorr cited on the artist's website <<http://www.vanessabeecroft.com/>>; *Parkett* 56 (1999) includes useful articles on Beecroft's work by Norman Bryson, Keith Seward, Pier Luigi Tazzi, and Jan Avgikos. Bryson's article "US Navy SEALs" (78-79) focuses on VB39 (1999) and highlights the military aesthetic of fascism of her one-off performance involving navy men (rather than the usual women), performed at the San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art, CA. In this context, VB39 can be read as an undoing of stillness as a sign of petrification, whereby the guard-like posing inherent to military discipline transforms immobility into the pre-stance for combat, dynamic movement par excellence. These taut masculine bodies seem somehow more obedient than the bodies of the female models, as though their athleticism (and uniforms, which, unlike the high-heels, *do not* destabilize the body's equilibrium) rendered them more naturally capable of sustaining the pose without crumbling into relaxation. Indeed, of all her VB performances, the SEAL models are the most static, and indicate perhaps that more than nudity and voyeurism, her concern is with the variations of uniformity and discipline.

<sup>71</sup> Of course, another reading of the high-heels could be that of objectified fetish, as studied in David Kunzle, *Fashion and Fetishism: A Social History of the Corset, Tight-lacing and other Forms of Body-Sculpture in the West*. (London: George Prior Associated, 1982).

<sup>72</sup> In another performance using black models, VB48 (performed after the G8 summit in Genova), she painted them a dark uniform "minstrel-style" black that eventually smudged and smeared itself over the walls or the floor on which they leaned, thus decomposing not only the pose but also the body's surface. Lawrence Steele interview with Amanda Coulson, *Tema Celeste* 90 (Feb-Mar 2002): 98-9.

the tension inherent to the performances, stilling into image what in live performance refuses to do so). The body squirms searching for a position it can't quite locate, resisting ossification despite the gaze of the audience. The *pose* is constantly *decomposing*.



12. Vanessa Beecroft, VB47, Peggy Guggenheim collection in Venice, Italy (June 2001).

## 4

*Anatomical Models and Automata**Discerning the Mechanism*

Take one step forward, and two backward. Introducing the theme of *rhythm*, enabled by the complexities of jointed articulation. We move from the ossified bodies of tableaux vivants to penetrable shells, back to the iconoclastic prying into the image to reveal its anatomy and mechanism. This time, however, the prying is not to destroy it and kill it off, nor to colonize it and replace it, but rather to prove its resilient life. Introducing the automaton, the moving statue, the hands-free puppet, the scientific or biological model, the technological marvel, the object of performance, the ticking, clicking, clanking sounds of the animation of the inanimate. We will see a game of chess, the incongruity of two bodies, a mould that doesn't quite fit, a suspicious translation of movement, an inside so dense with mechanism that it expels any potential inhabitant, allowing the demonstrator merely to touch the door handle or turn the crank mechanism. The animator is no longer inside, but *aside*; he has become an exhibitor engaged in showing the inside of a dead-alive object. The performative sacred objects previously attacked by Reformers (cf. chapter 2) are soon to be secularised into entertaining automata, yet the spectators are perhaps still fraught between belief in the miracle of the object's animation and an iconoclastic undoing of its artifice. Or perhaps the object must re-adjust to respond to a different set of questions.



In the *Encyclopédie*, D'Alembert defines the automaton as a machine that has within it the principle of movement.<sup>1</sup> The word automaton comes from the Greek *auto-matos*, 'self-moving,' an entity capable of independently originating action or motion. For this reason it was originally applied to the living rather than to the inanimate, and only later was it adopted to refer to animated machines. Automaton-makers have attempted to recreate the autonomous capacity for movement, at first through external visible gestures, and later through ambitious internal motions that would yield breath, voice, or, finally, thought. A moving corporeal image emulates some aspect or function of an animate being – must it

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Baptiste Le Rond D'Alembert, "Automate," *Encyclopédie, ou, Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts, et des métiers*, vol. 1 (Geneva, Paris & Neuchâtel, 1754-1772).

therefore look like what it emulates? And what rhythm, whose tempo, does it follow? Our earlier examples of incarnations of the divine image would descend from the cross, embrace, cry, bleed, sweat and speak, each in a unique gesture tailored to the belief of the spectator; each drop trickled in an irreproducible pattern, each embrace fitted the body of the embracer. Its temporality responded to the venerator. The pre-industrial mechanical object (not yet instrumentalised or labour-oriented) loses this relation to its spectator; it is as yet too delicate for interactivity, and serves predominantly a function of visible display. Like the mechanical clock, it is lost in its own looped self-referentiality, its repetitious gestures recur oblivious to the spectator's enchanted or disenchanted gaze.<sup>2</sup> Self-contained theatricality removes the automaton from any prop-like function, and it ostentatiously demonstrates precisely its *autonomy* from human agency, its supposed non-interaction, non-puppetry, non-prop, non-subjection to the human touch. *Look, no hands.*

A tentative definition of the essence of a machine could be that its means match its ends, that it presents no excess.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, from the moment the automaton replicates or substitutes the activities of man it is, in a certain sense, already excessive. This is particularly true of the elaborately decorative and theatrical aspect of early figure clocks and automata, which for the most part appear under android or zoomorphic guise. The first clocks were imprecise at time telling, in other words at rhythm, just as most early automata were somewhat superfluous in their playfully non-technological application. Not only did these kinetic sculptures aspire to continuity with the animate in terms of their visible shape, they also sought kinship in terms of their behaviour and performance. Clocks told (inaccurate) time by shifting eyes, opening mouths, moving arms – empty ciphers of what was once miraculous looking, speaking, signalling. They were at once over-delineated, presenting too much of a 'face,' as it were, as well as often 'faceless,' in the sense of not having a legible grid. Time was expressed as a rhythmic choreography of movements. Rather than indicate the hours on a flat surface, the automaton, like the early clock, embodied time and possessed it in its gestures. The ever popular fortune-telling automaton would tell the impending 'distant' time, nod in response to questions, move an arm, look up, around, down (as if to adjust its rhythm to our demands). And exotic non-Western characteristics made the figure even more persuasive, marvellous, spectacular and other. In effect, there was some historical truth to the exoticising of automata and mechanical devices. The earliest Western automata were Alexandrian and Byzantine, traceable back to the Greeks through the Arabs and the Romans.

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<sup>2</sup> Early clocks were in fact placed within the context of religion, on churches or monasteries in order to mark the hours of prayer, etc. This was soon followed by town clocks and subsequently clocks for personal and domestic use, corresponding to a secularisation of time.

<sup>3</sup> According to the *OED*, the functional aspect of the machine first appears in English in 1673, about the same time and probably with more currency of reference to stage machinery. Prior to this it refers to a structure rather than to an engine, though machination appears in 1549 and machine as a plot in 1450 with reference to secret contrivance, which could also derive from images of stage machinery.

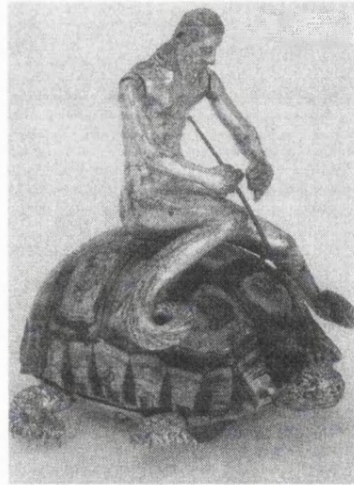
Clockwork served as a model of the astronomical universe, just as later it would serve as a model of political structures and of biological mechanisms, or indeed as a philosophical toy.<sup>4</sup> It is as though the regularity of clockwork might reflect upon the reliability and systematisation of the world. Or perhaps, on the contrary, exceed and compensate for the unpredictable aspects of the world. The time contained in the automaton's gestures could extend and outlive its maker, and this sanctioned it as a model of creation, or a conduit of the future.

Inevitably, between the body of the automaton and its maker, exhibitor, or collector, there existed a complex series of relationships, not only based on questions of appearance and rhythm. After the Reformation, the surviving church collections of relics (including wonders such as ostrich eggs) was either subsumed into or supplanted by the private collections of the cabinets of curiosities, the *Wunderkammer*, the proto-museum. Horst Bredekamp writes of their categorization according to four links in a chain of historical periods: natural formations – ancient sculptures – works of art – machines. “Like on the stage of a theatre, the *Kunstammer* demonstrated all the various stations in the transition from an inert natural material to an animated body.”<sup>5</sup> In this lineage fossils were akin to antique sculpture (both emerged from the soil), and machines were at once living entities and descendants from classical art. Thus it comes as little surprise that many automata used elements of classical iconography alongside incorporations of taxidermy, bits of dead animals, turtle shells, fur, skin, leather, all in a newly animated construct of fossil, relic, mummified corpse, sculpture, clockwork, metal.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The automaton has served as a central model/metaphor for different doctrines of materialism. See Daniel Tiffany, *Toy Medium: Materialism and Modern Lyric* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000). Then of course there is the famous first “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” by Walter Benjamin, in which the chess-playing automaton is a model for the theological impulses underlying historical materialism. Simon Schaffer verifies Benjamin's hypothesis in his essay “Enlightened Automata,” *The Sciences in Enlightened Europe*, eds. W. Clark, J. Golinski, S. Schaffer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999): 126-165. For accounts of the world as machine, see E.J. Dijksterhuis, *The Mechanization of the World Picture*, trans. C. Dikshoorn, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961); and Otto Mayr, *Authority, Liberty and Automatic Machinery in Early Modern Europe* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1986). Also on automata and clockwork see M.G. Losano, *Storie di Automi dalla Grecia Classica alla Belle Epoque* (Torino, Einaudi, 1990); Derek J. de Solla Price, “Automata and the Origins of Mechanism and Mechanistic Philosophy,” *Technology and Culture* 5, 1 (1964): 9-23; Silvio A. Bedini, “The Role of Automata in the History of Technology,” *Technology and Culture* 5, 1 (1964): 24-42; Alfred Chapuis and Edmond Droz, *Automata: A Historical and Technological Study*, trans. A. Reid, (Neuchâtel: Editions du Griffon, 1958); G.P. Ceserani, *I Falsi Adam: Storia e Mito degli Automi* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1969); Ceserani, *Gli Automi: Storia e Mito* (Roma: Laterza, 1983); Jean-Claude Beaune, “The Classical Age of Automata: An Impressionistic Survey from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century,” *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, vol. 1., 431-480; John Cohen, *Human Robots in Myth and Science* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1966); A. Mercier, “Des Théâtres de Machines au Portefeuille de Vaucanson,” *L'Âme au Corps: Arts et Sciences 1793-1993*, ed. Jean Clair (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), 130-139; Barbara Maria Stafford and Frances Terpak, *Devices of Wonder: From the World in a Box to Images on a Screen* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2001); Linda Strauss, “Reflections in a Mechanical Mirror: Automata as Doubles and as Tools,” *Knowledge and Society* 10 (1996): 179-207; C. Bailly, *Automata: The Golden Age 1848-1914* (London: Sotheby's Publications, 1987).

<sup>5</sup> Bredekamp, *The Lure of Antiquity*, 11. Cf. Adalgisa Lugli, *Naturalia et Mirabilia: Les??? Cabinets de Curiosités en Europe*, trans. M.-L. Lentengre (Paris: Adam Biro, 1998), especially 40-8; Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature: 1150-1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998); Caroline W. Bynum, “Wonder,” *American Historical Review* (1997): 1-26.

<sup>6</sup> From as early as 1304 the entertainment at the Castle of Hesdin included automata monkeys which were covered and recovered in skins (proof of their vulnerable over-use?), to which horns were later added. Sherwood, “Magic and Mechanics in Medieval Fiction,” 589.



13. Neptune riding a mechanical tortoise, early 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The statuary relics of the Middle-Ages had been animated by belief in the presence of the prototype, the original who 'puppeteered' the object and gave it miraculous beneficial powers. These strange amalgams of animate/inanimate matter were neither emulating nor participating in an original prototype (cf. chapters 1-2), they could be their own delightful fantasy. Neither resurrection nor miracle, they were undeniably entertaining technological marvels, exciting a willing suspension of disbelief. Religious scenes such as Adam and Eve or the flagellation of Christ were also mechanized, but the main purpose for such objects during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was diversion at the courtly ceremonies, not religious ritual. In 1671, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz wrote that "Italian works of art consisted almost solely of the formation of lifeless, still-standing and purely aesthetic things. The Germans, on the other hand, were for all time busy producing moveable works that satisfied not only the eyes and the curiosity of great men, but also performed a task, subordinating nature to art and able to make human work easier."<sup>7</sup> By the middle of the eighteenth century, mechanics was conceptually and actually disengaged from the realm of the tradition of antiquity and art, and determinedly entering the domain of utility and technology. The object of animation, now a secular form of entertainment, was becoming increasingly mechanised. Rather than accompanying man, it was gradually replacing him. Jean Baudrillard differentiates between the automaton and the robot as follows:

One is the theatrical, mechanical and clockwork counterfeit of man where the technique is to submit everything to *analogy* and to the simulacrum-effect. The other is dominated by a

<sup>7</sup> Bredekamp, 81-2. See also K. Maurice and O. Mayr (eds.), *The Clockwork Universe: German Clocks and Automata 1550-1650* (New York: Neale Watson Academic Publications, 1980). Leibniz's nationalistic statement seems apposite, as in truth it was precisely in the countries of Protestant 'disbelief' that automata and clockwork most flourished (especially as symbols of autocratic power at a time of religious unrest). The German apogee of clock-making came in the middle of the seventeenth century, after which the highest skills were demonstrated in Catholic France, Protestant Switzerland and England.



technical principle where the machine has the upper hand, and where, with the machine, *equivalence* is established. The automaton plays the man of the court, the socialite, it takes part in the social and theatrical drama of pre-Revolutionary France. As for the robot, as its name implies, it works; end of the theatre, beginning of human mechanics. The automaton is the *analogon* of man and remains responsive to him (even playing draughts with him!). The machine is the equivalent of man, appropriating him to itself as an equal in the unity of a functional process. This sums up the difference between first- and second-order simulacra.<sup>8</sup>

Our timeframe will be that of the pre-industrial, pre-cybernetic, pre-functional automata, the object as insular theatrical performance, not yet labour; as excessive *ludic* display, not yet compact instrument, although the tension is always inherent. For now, we will remain on the brink of spectatorial belief.

Revealing the inside of the animated object was to prove essential to the rhetoric of those who displayed automata, for in order to avoid the accusation of dabbling in miracles or idolatry they had to parade the wires and cogs in all their glory. Whereas with the icon, the relic, the incorrupt cadaver and even the tableaux vivant, the object participates in its original, here we are presented with strategic *dissociation*, a relational image which is not participatory but is *set in motion* and then left to its own devices. The automaton had to carve itself a very specific niche in relation to its maker or exhibitor, one which disassociated their respective bodies whilst showing their analogies. As we saw in chapter 2, anxious to efface their own construction, automata are at once complete and incomplete, their persuasive autonomy relying necessarily on the hand that winds them up. To sidestep the miraculous, they must show their animating mechanism whilst denying it, and the body of the 'operator' must be at once distant enough to avoid puppetry or masking, and adjacent enough to remind the spectator of his winding hand. Although, somewhat like the icon or relic, the automata is in the image not-made-by-human-hands tradition, the *hand* of the operator becomes paramount to the display of automata, suggesting at once the ostentatious gesture of showing, pointing, signalling: *look, no hands* (look at my hands indicating, not doing), as well as the automaton's imminent incorporation into instrumentality (this will soon extend or even replace my hand).

Parallels between the human body and the body of the automaton were increasingly sought, and found. The dissecting hands of physicians (or rather, the barbers cutting in their place, and

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<sup>8</sup> Jean Baudrillard, "The Order of Simulacra," *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. I.H. Grant (London and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1993), 50-86, 53.

Much has been made of the Marxist notion of the machine as 'dead labour' which 'pumps dry' the living labour, usurps the workman and transforms him into a part of a detail-machine. This is a massive subject which far exceeds the scope of this chapter. Mazlish refers to an initial discontinuity between man and machine, which, like the discontinuities between the earth and the universe (Copernicus), man and the animal reign (Darwin), consciousness and unconsciousness (Freud), have been or are in process of being overcome. Bruce Mazlish, *The Fourth*

the *ostensors* pointing to the organs), delving into the flesh of the dead as if in search of the wind-up key, the locus of the animating soul, cannot but recall Baudelaire's invading gesture that eventually kills off what it seeks to give life to. The excitement of anatomical probing runs parallel to the sensation of androids, and the metaphor of the man-machine, so central to philosophy and science during the seventeenth century, relied significantly on the discoveries enabled by dissection. Descartes, inspired by the hydraulic statues in the dark grottoes of Saint Germain, conceived his notion of the beast-machine and dissected animals alive.<sup>9</sup> The late Renaissance had been zealously prying into the dissectable body, and the Enlightenment would continue this separation of muscle from bone in order to ascertain, in true Enlightened fashion, what's inside, what lies hidden, what animates.<sup>10</sup> Dissection was the dread of criminals, and bodies of the dead were hard to come by in a practice that itself was viewed with religious and ethical unease. Perhaps for this reason the images engaged in disseminating anatomical knowledge emphatically conveyed a cooperative submission, scapegoating the human body's pain and fear of dismemberment by flaunting their own aestheticized/anaesthetized willingness. Once again, the image persuasively proposes itself as simultaneously dead-alive. Often dissection is construed as vivisection, as clearly apparent in the many anatomical representations which show the flayed figure alive and well, acknowledging the spectator, inviting one in. Images of eroticised sleeping beauties, languidly resting on velvet cushions,<sup>11</sup> or Christ-like exhibitors of their wounds or stigmata, were facilitating the probe of the Doubting Thomas like never before. Such figures might hold their skin as though lifting a dainty dress, or enable the spectator the pleasure of disrobing the flesh through the device of flap-parts, hinged doors and removable partitions. Like the automaton, they appear to enounce in their labialisation a trickle from eye to hand: *look, touch, enter*. The violence, pain and ultimate death caused by anatomising the living body is repaired in the performance of the image, which generously sacrifices itself to the pursuit of knowledge. A cadaver would only last a few days at the most, and thus images must come in to extend their decaying putrefaction, lend them the odourlessness of incorruption, and enable fragmentation without any loss of integrity – in continuation with what were previously miraculous instances of flesh-cum-image (the

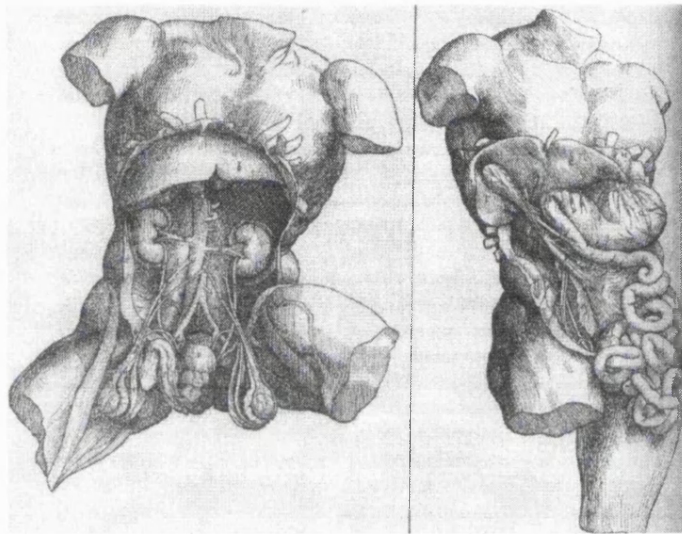
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*Discontinuity: The Co-evolution of Humans and Machines* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1993). For an excellent discussion of man as machine-like instrument, see Asendorf, *Batteries of Life*.

<sup>9</sup> René Descartes, "Treatise on Man," 1622, *Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 1, trans. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, D. Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 99-108, 100; Cf. Julian Jaynes, "The Problem of Animate Motion in the Seventeenth Century," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 31, 2 (1970): 219-234, 224; Leonora Cohen Rosenfield, *From Beast to Man-Machine* (New York: Octagon Books, 1968); Georges Canguilhem, "Machine and Organism," *Incorporations*, 45-69.

<sup>10</sup> On anatomy and dissection see Jonathan Sawday, "The Fate of Marsyas: Dissecting the Renaissance Body," *Renaissance Bodies: the Human Figure in English Culture c. 1540-1660*, eds. L. Gent and N. Llewellyn (London: Reaktion Books, 1990), 111-135; Michel Lemire, "Fortunes et infortunes de l'anatomie et des préparations anatomiques, naturelles et artificielles," *L'Âme au Corps: Arts et Sciences 1793-1993*, 70-101; Barbara M. Stafford, *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine* (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1991); K.B. Roberts and J.D.W. Tomlinson, *The Fabric of the Body: European Traditions of Anatomical Illustration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

relics and incorrupt cadavers discussed in chapter 1). Somewhere between the statuary relic and the Rood of Kent, these images have an elaborate *inside*, one which is both fleshed out and fleshed in. Anatomical wax models were an effective surrogate for the human body, and could be modelled according to classical statuary ('Florentine' Venuses were among the most popular models): dissectable, breakable, but ultimately *unwoundable*. Truncated sculptures such as the Belvedere Torso were ideal subjects, as their inherent fragmentation justified and dignified further dissection.<sup>12</sup> An illustration from Andreas Vesalius's *De humani corporis fabrica* (1532) shows the statue poised between an inside of raw stone and a disgorging of visceral flesh, uniting, as did Rilke, the fate of images with that of bodies.



14. Woodcut from Andreas Vesalius, *De humani corporis fabrica*, 1532.

More optimistic aspects of bodies and machines were intersecting. In 1748, Julien Offray de la Mettrie would polemically state that, like the automaton, the "human body is a machine which winds up its own springs,"<sup>13</sup> whereas miraculous animation is a product of the powers of the imagination, through which "the wood speaks, the echoes sigh, the rocks weep, marble breathes, and all inanimate objects gain life."<sup>14</sup> Only clockwork machines are truly animate. A Physician himself, he employed examples of muscle-tissue irritability to clarify his theory of *L'Homme-Machine*, writing that the "flesh of all animals palpitates after death... Muscles

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Marina Warner, "Waxworks and Wonderlands," *Visual Display: Culture Beyond Appearances*, eds. L. Cooke and Wollen (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995), 179-201; M.L. Azzaroli et al., "La Venere Scomponibile," *Kos* 4 (May 1984): 65-94.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Glenn Harcourt, "Andreas Vesalius and the Anatomy of Antique Sculpture," *Representations* 17 (1987): 28-61; Luke Wilson, "William Harvey's *Prelectiones*: The Performance of the Body in the Renaissance Theater of Anatomy," *Representations* 17 (1987): 62-95.

<sup>13</sup> Julien Offray de la Mettrie, *Man a Machine*, 1748, trans. G.C. Bussey. (Illinois: Open Court, 1912), 93. A radical materialist, La Mettrie continued Descartes' postulation of the animal as machine, extending this theory to humans. His ideas were not well received, and initially he published the book anonymously, although later he was forced to live in exile, and his book *Histoire naturelle de l'âme* was put to flames. On the notion of the body through Descartes and la Mettrie see, Dalia Judovitz, *The Culture of the Body: Genealogies of Modernity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

<sup>14</sup> La Mettrie, 108.

separated from the body contract when they are stimulated... Polyps do more than move after they have been cut in pieces. In a week they regenerate to form as many animals as there are pieces..."<sup>15</sup> Additional proof is illustrated by the scurrying of a headless chicken, and the leaping of a dead man's heart. La Mettrie's list of facts to prove the autonomy of each part of the organised body<sup>16</sup> (thus confirming his theory of the clockwork structure of the human body) very graphically suggests the duality of the living-dead body. Life is a property of matter, not of the soul. The flayed or sliced body continues to palpitate and move, and the transparent sight of its incision is in no way an obstacle to its animation. Ultimately, this example of the Enlightened resurrected body, so to speak, conforms to the newfound perception of the automaton. In other words, the intersected view is not a devastating intrusive gash, but on the contrary, enables a clearer idea of how the mechanism functions *while* it continues to operate. *But still it moves!* No strings, no hands. And like the automaton, we too deny our own wind-up key: "We are in the position of a watch that should say...: 'I was never made by that fool of a workman, I who divide time, who mark so exactly the course of the sun, who repeat aloud the hours which I mark! No! that is impossible!'"<sup>17</sup> Anatomical automata illustrated this double-vision. The discerning of the clockwork creates a different kind of beholder, no longer the gullible witness of a miracle of animation, but an Enlightened x-ray perception, converted, as it were, through seeing "those springs [of life] hidden under the external integument which conceals so many wonders from our eyes."<sup>18</sup>

A decade earlier, in 1738, Jacques de Vaucanson (the rival of Prometheus, according to Voltaire) had provided a perfect example of the overlapping of anatomy and automata, as well as illustrating the manifest transparency of the machine. I refer to the famous *Canard digérant*: the anatomical, drinking, eating and shitting duck. The most extraordinary feature of this example of machinery was not so much its capacity for animated life-like movement, although this too was praised; far more applauded was the duck's productive intestinal tract. The automaton duck quacked, spread its tail, opened and flapped its wings, extended its neck to eat some grain, muddled the water it drank. Shortly after, it exhibited healthy bowel movement in the form of a runny little green mound. Vaucanson was most proud of his creation's excretion, stating in his exhibiting pamphlet "The food is digested as in real animals, by dissolution, not trituration, as some philosophers will have it... The matter digested in the stomach is conducted by pipes, (as in an animal by the guts) quite to the anus, where there is a

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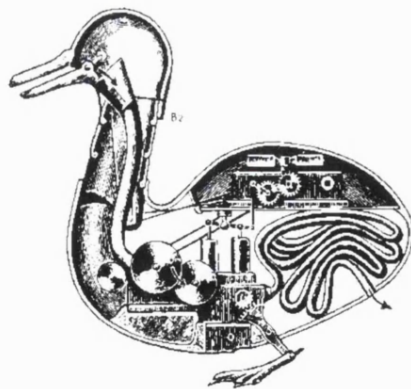
<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 129-30.

<sup>16</sup> Elsewhere, following Descartes, la Mettrie writes: "The human body is a watch, a large watch constructed with such skill and ingenuity, that if the wheel which marks the second happens to stop, the minute wheel turns and keeps on going its round, and in the same way the quarter-hour wheel, and all the others go on running when the first wheels have stopped because rusty or, for any reason, out of order. Is it not for a similar reason that the stoppage of a few blood vessels is not enough to destroy or suspend the strength of the movement which is in the heart as in the mainspring of the machine." *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 145

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

sphincter that lets it out."<sup>19</sup> The fact that it could defecate became the talk of many towns it toured. Its internal mechanism was very much the centre of attention, and the transparency of digestion, the ultimate process implying inner machinations, was proudly exposed, as was the result of his digestion, passed around the audience for them to verify its foul smell. The audience could observe the clockworks of the stomach-box in all its visceral glory. Vaucanson remarked "Perhaps some ladies, or some people, who like only the outside of animals, had rather have seen the whole covered; that is, the Duck with feathers. But besides, that I have been desir'd to make every thing visible; I wou'd not be thought to impose upon the spectators by any conceal'd or juggling contrivance."<sup>20</sup> Most viewers might prefer the unintrusive illusion of a real being, where the outer envelope retains the cohesiveness of the miracle of animation. Nevertheless, in Vaucanson's commentary the spectator is assumed or forced to occupy the position of a sceptic. Unless, like the Doubting Thomas, he actually see for himself, visually penetrate the animated, to some degree resurrected, piece of inanimate mechanism, he will not believe. Transparency and permeability are necessary for the machine to function as persuasive discourse.<sup>21</sup> The very subsistence of automata relied heavily on the means of their display. In their existence as sheer spectacle, these visual exhibits interiorised the rhetoric of display in both their physical construction and in the mannerisms of their exhibitor.<sup>22</sup> The automaton-maker and exhibitor, like the anatomist or encyclopaedist, are engaged in *revealing*, while standing apart from each other at a "critical" distance.



15. Vaucanson's Duck, 1738.

<sup>19</sup> M. [Jacques de] Vaucanson, *An Account of the Mechanism of an Automaton*, trans. J.T. Desaguliers (London: T. Parker, 1742), 21-22. Original title *Le Mécanisme du Fluteur Automate* (1738). Alongside the duck he also exhibited an android flute-player and pipe-and-drum player, later touring in London at the Opera House in the Haymarket, for which this pamphlet accompanied the demonstration. Various anecdotes in relation to the Duck are recounted in Chapius and Droz, 233-242. See also Daniel Cottom, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Digestion," *Representations* 66 (1999): 52-74; Hillel Schwartz, *A Happening Thing*, published online at [http://www.dimensionsmagazine.com/dimtext/Schwartz/Happening\\_thing.html](http://www.dimensionsmagazine.com/dimtext/Schwartz/Happening_thing.html) (consulted 20 February 2002).

<sup>20</sup> Vaucanson, 22-23. "My design being rather to demonstrate the manner of the actions, rather than to shew the machine."

<sup>21</sup> One might compare this type of visual transparency of the mechanism to the descriptions in the *Encyclopédie*, which focused on the technicalities of manufacturing and on scientific knowledge, implying the transferability of the skills of the artisan. Fortuitously, the entries *androïde* and *automate* by D'Alembert are almost entirely dedicated to Vaucanson's automata, including descriptions from Vaucanson's own memoirs.

Such transparency lay at the heart of Vaucanson's (unrealised) plan to create a "moving anatomy." Like many an automaton-maker, Vaucanson had higher ambitions which the entertaining success of his duck and flute-player both funded and distracted from. He considered himself a man of science first and foremost, and in the midst of the heated debate on blood circulation and the benefits of bloodletting, he aimed at developing a hydraulic automaton that might illustrate the flow of blood in the human body, following the theories of William Harvey.<sup>23</sup> Once more, this automaton would serve a mission of persuasion, proving the theory of circulation, of movement, through its very showing of mechanism and its essence as an engine of self-propelled movement.<sup>24</sup> Hypothetically, this would be the ultimate materialisation of a bleeding statue, but one where rather than haemorrhage from beneath the sculptural shell outwards, the statue would gently palpitate, showing the circuit of the arterial flow which could be interrupted to bleed (or indeed be cicatrised) at will.

The automaton serves as a model which refers both within and beyond itself. It is paramount that this effect of transparency be inscribed in the "flesh" of the automaton. In looking at illustrations or photographs of automata, particularly those of Vaucanson (and, as we shall soon see, of Kempelen), one is continually presented with the view of mechanical viscera. The recurrent sight of a pierced sculpture, a sculptural shell containing an inside which can be violated, is by no means excruciating; if anything it is didactic, or enchanting, or both. Unlike the iconoclastic gesture, this functions towards the *indestructibility* of the machine. It would appear that *the more visible the mechanism, the more genuine its animation*. Clockwork, for all its mass of pulleys, gears and screws, proves autonomous automation. And the winding-up of the mechanical key represented no inconsistency; on the contrary, it only added to the machine's autonomy from human agency. The hand is engaged in showing its apparent non-intervention. Emphasising its dissociation from the object of animation, it aims to be forgotten in the thrill of its animating effect. As Simon Schaffer writes: "The intelligence attributed to machines hinges on the *cultural invisibility* of the human skills which accompany them."<sup>25</sup> La Mettrie reminds us of the persistence of movement, however slight, in one or more fibres; when almost extinguished, movement needs only to be stimulated to be reanimated. A simple prod should suffice. Thousands of quivering frog's legs come to mind, galvanized by the jab of

<sup>22</sup> On the instrument as demonstrator/demonstration, see the excellent study of Thomas L. Hankins and Robert J. Silverman, *Instruments and the Imagination* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

<sup>23</sup> For this purpose he invented the first flexible tube out of India rubber (caoutchouc). He was also an inventor in the field of textile technology, namely, the automatic weaving of silk brocades (the strikes of the silk workers against their replacement inaugurated the conflicts that characterised the later industrial revolution.)

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Daniel Puymège, "Les Anatomies Mouvantes," *Milieux* 7, 8 (1981-2): 62-9.

<sup>25</sup> Simon Schaffer, "Babbage's Dancer and the Impresarios of Mechanism," *Cultural Babbage: Technology, Time and Invention*, eds. F. Spufford and J. Uglow (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), 53-80, 80.

electric current.<sup>26</sup> This is the 'winding-up,' as it were, that sets into motion. The automaton folds time into itself, gathering within its wrinkles a certain rhythm that, once activated, is released and unpleated into equidistant, or, indeed, musical throbs. *The brevity of the winding-up is dilated in the winding-down.* Such is the efficacy of energy and of labour. Minimum intervention, but intervention nonetheless, lies at the heart of the automaton. And the sooner this participation is forgotten, the better. The redundancy of the automaton-maker, standing effortlessly aside his automaton, becomes the basis of his glorification. Like the Creator, who withdraws once his creation is complete, the clocksmith is unneeded for his clock to tick. "This machine, when once wound up, performs all its different operations without being touched any more."<sup>27</sup> A small twist of the wrist reverberating in an astounding complex choreography of movements... The exhibitor is no puppeteer, he is but the generator, the originator, the clean-handed mastermind.



#### *A game of Chess.*

For a moment let us not think of it as a combat of intelligence, nor as a mapping of warfare strategies, but more simply as a series of movements which effect other movements. Such a view of the chess game as pure choreography leads to a reading of its ceremony in terms of dynamics, kinetics, mechanics.

Two figures sit opposite each other, deep in immobilising thought. Concise gestures break the stillness, using a minimum number of joints. Originating in the shoulder, a force seemingly guided by an invisible string raises the elbow, next the wrist, next the grasp of the thumb and index finger, creating a nominal motion which then exhausts itself and drops back into place. In turn, this mobilised marionette moves a smaller marionette, a pawn, literally.

Mirror-like, the figure opposite does the same. And so forth.

As a consequence, in another realm of space and time, a micro-choreography takes place on the grid of the chequered stage. Blunt forward movements can only last for so long before side movements, oblique movements and a combination of the two start to complicate the possible sequence of positions. Finally, the motions wind down to a limited set of steps, narrower and

<sup>26</sup> Were there more space it would be fascinating to elaborate on the experiments with electricity as a resurrecting force, as fictionalised in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Indeed, early electrical experimentation was highly performative and brings in the question of the 'subject' of electrification, be this the experimenter himself or the voluntary bodies (or cadavers) of others. Cf. Iwan Rhys Morus, *Frankenstein's Children: Electricity, Exhibition, and Experiment in Early-Nineteenth-Century London* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); L. Bossi, "L'Âme Électrique," *L'Âme au Corps*, 160-179.

<sup>27</sup> Vaucanson, 23.

narrower until the final triumphant cornering and paralysis. Checkmate. The effect of the pattern is depletion.

This choreographic tendency of the game of chess is further enhanced by its allusion to puppetry. Political hierarchies – pawns, knights, kings – are reflected in the role of the player as mathematical mastermind. The pieces of wood or ivory are helpless despite their various degrees of control and capacities for attack or defence, for their destiny is mapped out by some other greater force. The player literally projects himself into the pieces of the game, then physically moves them.

In a game of chess, it is clear that no movement is autonomous, each move is inter-dependent and conditions the next. The excitement of the contest lies in the uncertainty that haunts each strategic pass. This was the great dilemma which fascinated viewers of and commentators on Baron von Kempelen's famous chess-playing automata: the Turk. How could an automated machine respond to the thousands of unpredictable variables implied in a game of chess? As our keenest observer Edgar Allen Poe observes, "A few moves having been made, *no* step is certain."<sup>28</sup> Here too, let us focus more on visual perception rather than comprehension. Indeed, already prior to Kleist (who will feature in the next chapter), *consciousness is mapped from choreography* – the kinetics of the chessgame reveals the anatomy of thought. The ability to move is not as surprising as the ability to move with intention, something the inanimate, according to the demystifying enlightened spectator, is as yet incapable of. Since divine intention no longer animates the image, its newfound mechanical movement becomes a hollow loop, repetitiously, inadvertently, marking the passing of time, not the hallowed instance of conversion and substantiation of belief. Lack of intention dilutes gesture into pure repetitious rhythmicity. The Turk can be studied not as a forefather of artificial intelligence, and a deceptive one at that, but instead as a paradigm of mechanical automata, a formal array of rhythmic movements, conspicuously articulated in relation to its operator and/or exhibitor. Two bodies, man and machine, are on display side by side, showing, hiding, or showing in order to hide one another, a convoluted strategy of shuffling belief.

One in a long genealogy of machines to challenge the human being, time and again the chess-player's autonomy of human agency was contested and speculated upon as false. The Turk incited curiosity as much as scepticism, and critics were sharp-eyed spectators, keenly

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<sup>28</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, "Maelzel's Chess Player," *The Complete works of Edgar Allan Poe: Essays, Miscellaneous, Literati, Autography*, vol. 14-15, ed. J.A. Harrison (New York: Fred de Frau & Co., 1902), 6-37. First published in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, April 1836. Poe had been keenly observing Maelzel's demonstration of the Turk, and wrote this article to uncover its secret (plagiarising countless theories on the automaton published earlier). According to his biographers, the article represents an early example of abstract reasoning, or *ratiocination*, as he termed it, which he later developed in his mystery stories. Cf. W.K. Wimsatt, "Poe and the Chess Automaton," *American Literature* 11



describing each sleight of hand of both machine and exhibitor, poring over the minute choreographic telltales. Indeed, it is this attentive suspicion which enables for us such a vivid recreation of the manner in which it was displayed. The incredulity with which it was received can be seen as one of the last resistances to artificial intelligence. Around the same time, the calculator was invented, spurring the lineage of machines we are all so familiar with. Before this, automata such as the Duck or the Flute Player were machines only inasmuch as they could *move*, not think.<sup>29</sup>

The history and description of the chess-playing automaton, and the ritual of its display:

In 1769, a Frenchman by the name of Pelletier was engaged in the spectacle of magnetism, entertaining the court of the Empress Maria Theresa of Austria. The Hungarian Wolfgang von Kempelen was present specifically for the occasion. Being well-known for his mechanical ingenuity, the Empress wanted him to explain the trickery on display. We will never know whether he revealed it to her, but he did propose to construct an experiment the effect of which would be far more astonishing and its illusion more complete than the one they were witnessing. Six months later, he appeared at court with the automaton chess-player, the challenge of a mesmerised human outdone by that of a thinking machine.<sup>30</sup> Its success was immense and unanticipated. Kempelen's automaton gradually attracted so many visitors that he found its notoriety a burden, and dismantled the machine. But under the pressure of the heir to the throne Emperor Joseph II, he found himself obliged to restore the automaton and was given imperial beneficence to tour the automaton throughout Europe from 1783. The Turk was later acquired in 1818 by another Hungarian, Johann Nepomuk Maelzel, who toured the automaton through America between the years 1826-1838. It was finally destroyed in the 1854 fire that consumed Peale's Museum in Philadelphia, its last habitat.

According to the descriptions of an Oxford Graduate who saw Maelzel's exhibition in London in 1819, the automaton was

the figure of a Turk, as large as life, dressed after the Turkish fashion, sitting behind a chest of three feet and a half in length, two feet in breadth, and two and a half in height, to which it is attached by the wooden seat on which it sits... On the plain surface formed by the top of the

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(1939/40): 138-151. In an interesting juxtaposition, Robert Wilcocks' *Maelzel's Chess Player: Sigmund Freud and the Rhetoric of Deceit* (Lanham, Md: Rowan and Littlefield, 1994) compares Poe's strategy of exposé to that of Freud.

<sup>29</sup> Unless of course one considers mythic 'thinking' and speaking heads, such as that of Albertus Magnus or Bacon, see above, p. 59, ff 57.

<sup>30</sup> The question of mesmerism and hypnotism would provide a rich detour to this thesis, indeed a parallel history. Mesmerists were viewed as puppeteers and those mesmerised as automata (cf. Simon Schaffer, "Self-Evidence," *Critical Enquiry* 18 (1992), 327-362, 351). However, the ostensible dissociation of the body of the automaton exhibitor from his automaton was reversed in the relation of the hypnotist to his subject, where in addition to vocal

chest, in the centre, is a raised immovable chess-board of handsome dimensions, upon which the figure has its eyes fixed; its right arm and hand being extended on the chest, and its left arm somewhat raised, as if in the attitude of holding a Turkish pipe, which originally was placed in its hand.

The exhibitor begins by wheeling the chest into the entrance of the apartment within which it stands, and in face of the spectators. He then opens certain doors contrived in the chest, two in the front, and two in the back, at the same time pulling out a long shallow drawer at the bottom of the chest made to contain the chess men, a cushion for the arm of the figure to rest upon, and some counters. Two lesser doors, and a green cloth screen, contrived in the body of the figure, and its lower parts, are likewise opened, and the Turkish robe which covers them is raised; so that the construction both of the figure and chest internally is displayed. In this state the Automaton is moved round for the examination of the spectators; and to banish all suspicion from the most sceptical mind, that any living subject is concealed within any part of it, the exhibitor introduces a lighted candle into the body of the chest and figure, by which the interior is, in a great measure, rendered transparent, and the most secret corner is shown. Here it may be observed, that the same precaution to remove suspicion is used, if requested, at the close as at the commencement of a game of chess with the Automaton.... After sufficient time, during which each spectator may satisfy his scruples and his curiosity, the exhibitor recluses the doors of the chest and figure, and the drawer at the bottom; makes some arrangements in the body of the figure, winds up the works with a key inserted into a small opening on the side of the chest... and invites any individual present to play a game of Chess.<sup>31</sup>

The Turk's features fitted perfectly with an orientalist fantasy of the unknown.<sup>32</sup> Only the upper portion of the torso, the part visible to the spectator, had been fully completed to suggest a human figure, whereas the lower part of the torso was the apparent mechanism, cloaked to create a more anthropomorphic effect. The automaton would be shown "naked," as an earlier publicising (not debunking) pamphlet wrote, "with his garments tucked up, the drawer and all the doors of the cupboard open,"<sup>33</sup> before or after the game, but not during (i.e. only when inert and lifeless, not when in motion). Once more, like the puppets at Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*, the erogenous zone of sexuality is the site of entrance for the proof of illusion (albeit from behind, in the case of the Turk).

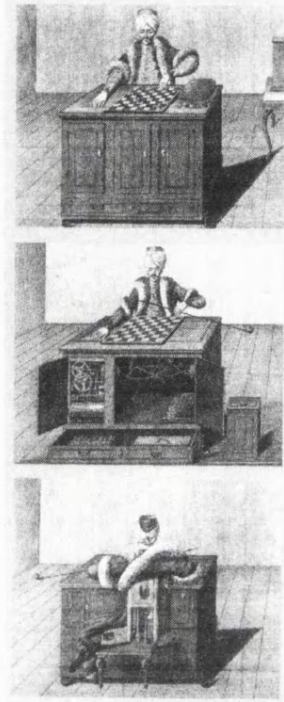
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commands a series of physical mesmeric "passes" were employed, thus establishing a clear point of connection between the two bodies (one which could penetrate even through walls!).

<sup>31</sup> Oxford Graduate, *Observations on the Automaton Chess Player* (London: J. Hatchard, 1819), pp 15-19.

<sup>32</sup> Joseph II had asked Kempelen to reassemble the Turk during his anti-Turkish diplomatic campaign. Stafford refers to an Enlightenment attack on Orientalism, or Asiatic theurgy, thought to be an "artful science of specious demonstrations supposedly preyed on the stupidity of enslaved races fed daily doses of delusion." Barbara M. Stafford, *Artful Science: Enlightenment Entertainment and the Eclipse of Visual Education* (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1993), 8.

<sup>33</sup> Charles Gottlieb Windisch, *Inanimate Reason; or a Circumstantial Account of that Astonishing Piece of Mechanism, M. de Kempelen's Chess Player* (London: S. Bladon, 1784), 26-27. Translated from German on the occasion of the Chess Player's exhibition in London at Saville-Row Burlington Gardens.



16. Kempelen's Turk as illustrated in Windisch's pamphlet, 1783.

The chess-player was exhibited according to this strict formula of 'showing', which varied little over a period of more than half a century. The automaton would invariably play white and so had the first move. The hand would descend, grasp the piece, lift it, convey it to the desired square, and set it down. Once the Turk had made its move, the exhibitor would make the same move on the opponent's chessboard, and vice versa. At each movement of the automaton, the sound of machinery could be distinctly heard, and every ten or twelve moves the exhibitor would return to the chest, insert his key, and rewind the machinery. The game was generally limited to thirty minutes, but if the opponent wished to continue, the exhibitor usually allowed it. When Maelzel exhibited the automaton, he gave it speech enabling it to say *échec* (checkmate).<sup>34</sup> Most of the time the Turk won, although on a few rare occasions he lost.

By now the sounds of the ritual of this game of chess will be present in the mind's ear. The rhythm is evident, loud enough to pervade the scene without invading it. One hears the creaky wheeling in of the chest, the exhibitor's announcement that he will now proceed to show the inner workings of the machine, the rattle of the keys and the clanking of the doors, unlock, open, shut, lock, unlock, open, shut, lock. In between, sighs of wonder. The exhibitor challenges the audience, "who shall play against the Turk?" The challenge accepted, he proceeds to arrange the chessboard, carefully stationing each piece, which gently resounds as it

<sup>34</sup> Kempelen had actually made a "genuine" talking machine. Cf. Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 351.

comes into contact with its allocated position. First, he completes the automaton's chessboard. Then, its replica on the opponent's table. Table set, one hears the winding up of the key. The game may now commence. Silence rules, with the exception of each move striking the chessboard, echoed shortly after with its duplication on the other chessboard. Each move made by the automaton is preceded by a slight shudder in the left shoulder about two seconds before the actual movement. The rhythm of the moves is not regular, but pensive, following the organic impulse of thought. In the intervals, one hears the footfalls of the exhibitor as he darts from board to board. At tactical moments of the game, the Turk distracts his opponent and audience by shaking his head and rolling his eyes. Every dozen or so moves, the key is rewound. Towards the final stages, the winding down and cornering, the Turk nods thrice as he endangers the King or Queen, or says dryly: *échec*. And all throughout one hears the sound of machinery, the noise of wheelwork "somewhat resembling that of a repeater,"<sup>35</sup> in other words, artillery (thus recalling chess's military underpinning).

Furthermore, there is an impenetrable supplementary performance taking place which many a viewer visualises as he watches the machinations of the game. Consider the specular nature of the first scene: the automaton moves a white pawn, the exhibitor likewise moves the white pawn on the opponent's table, the opponent moves a black pawn, the exhibitor moves the same black pawn on the automaton's table. According to the astute and imaginative spectator, inside the density of the clockwork, there is, one speculates, a small human, child, dwarf, or deformed cripple, contriving the automaton's moves from within. And he too has a facsimile of the chessboard laid out before him, and each move, too, echoes faintly as it shifts on the board. Furthermore, at the termination of the main game, smaller traveller's chessboards with unfinished games are laid out to be resolved at request, followed by a demonstration of how the knight can cover each of the 64 squares by a series of 63 leaps, beginning on any square designated by the audience. Then, to satisfy the remaining ardent spectators, the Turk responds to questions using a séance-like chessboard inscribed with the letters of the alphabet and numbers. Like the paradigm of Russian dolls, the entire display is a mirror-like multiplication of sights and sounds. Each spectacle is reflected both beyond itself in the macro and within itself in the micro. This, we have seen, is the quintessence of the game of chess.

In a sense, the Baudelairian desire "to get at and *see the soul*"<sup>36</sup> referred to earlier, marked the Chess-playing automaton from its very inception. The Empress invites Kempelen to reveal the secret of Magnetism, and he in turn gives her a magic box, riddled with an even greater challenge: to divine its secret, pry open its inside. This surprising and unaccountable marvel is impenetrable, characterised by an ostentatious display without revelation. The core of the

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<sup>35</sup> Windisch, 31.

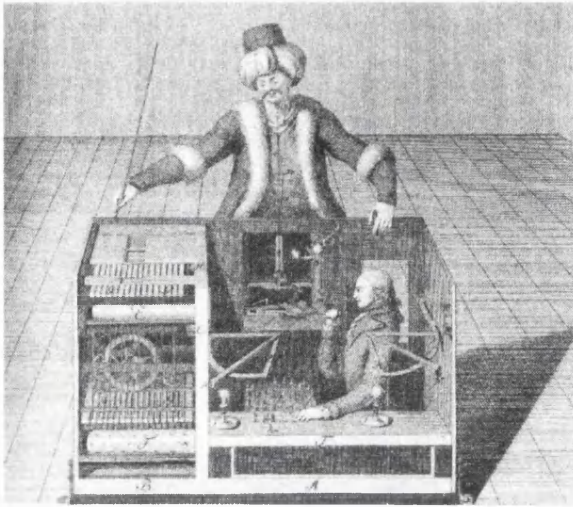
<sup>36</sup> Baudelaire, 202-3.

chess-game is challenge, and challenging indeed was the Turk's performance, contested by numerous pamphleteers attempting to get at and pry apart the dense clockwork. The main focus of most of the commentators was the automaton's inner machinations, be they truly mechanical or dependent on human agency. This desire to get inside the machine, to see through it, as it were, was undoubtedly also provoked by the ritual of display which flaunted the automaton's supposed transparency. Like the idol in the *Jeu de Saint Nicolas*, the figure must be hollow in order to reveal its inanimatedness (cf. chapter 2). The elaborate opening of locks, doors, drawers, in order to reveal the density of clockwork is not dissimilar to the conjurer's gesture of "nothing up my sleeve, nothing in the box."<sup>37</sup> Hypotheses suggested that the Turk was either possessed by evil spirits (according to a fainthearted old lady), remote-controlled or puppeteered by means of hidden lodestones, invisible wires or catgut (spurred by the exhibitor's strange decoys), or that a living agent was hiding crouched within it. According to one pamphleteer, there are three categories of automata: "the simple – the compound – and the spurious."<sup>38</sup> The first's movements result from mechanism alone; the second, by machinery in imperceptible communication with a human agent; the third, under the semblance of mechanism, is nothing but a fraud, in other words, a puppet. If in the charades of *tableaux vivants* the guesswork purported to recognise *which* original image was being emulated, here the challenge was to locate *where* exactly the movement originator might be hidden. For this was clearly no divine miracle, but mere human technology, and as an enlightened German periodical wrote in 1783, "physics, chemistry and mechanics have produced more miracles than those believed through the fanaticism and superstition in the ages of ignorance and barbarism."<sup>39</sup> All else failing, the body of the inventor/exhibitor is looked at as the potential body of the animating prototype. Who is the operating agent at the service of whom, who is the puppet and who the puppeteer? Or, to rephrase the question, who sets the tempo, man or machine? The spectators of the Turk were obsessed with comparisons between the body of the automaton and the body of his exhibitor/operator: are they umbilically linked? are they detached? how much do they touch each other and when? could they fit inside one another? is one body an extension, a prosthesis, a mask, an armour, a cage to the other? The two (or three) performers were comparatively scrutinised, each confessing a rhythmic possibility of contact.

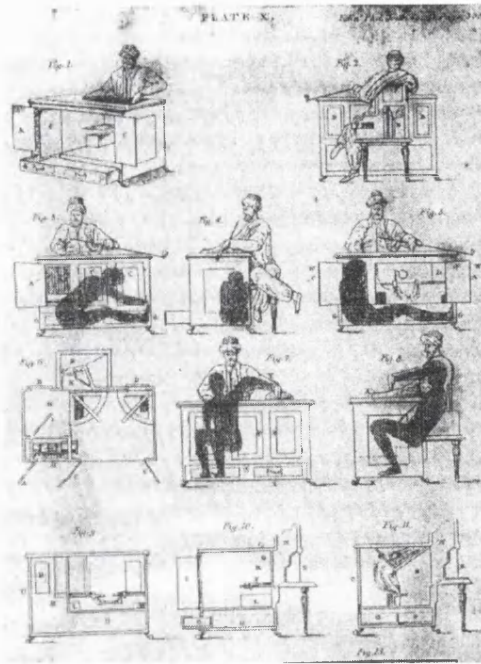
<sup>37</sup> Cf. Mark Sussman, "Performing the Intelligent Machine: Deception and Enchantment in the Life of the Automaton Chess Player," *Drama Review* T163 (1999): 81-96.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Willis (published anonymously), *Attempt to Analyze the Chess Automaton of Mr. De Kempelen* (London: J. Boothe, 1821), 9-10. This analysis ranks the chessplayer as the second category.

<sup>39</sup> Cited in Schaffer, "Babbage's Dancer," 63. See below on early stage magic.



17. Kempelen's Turk as illustrated in Racknitz's pamphlet, 1789.



18. Kempelen's Turk as illustrated in Willis' article 1821.

The consistent and undeviating routine of the exhibitor was in itself mechanical, as one might say of many an over-rehearsed theatrical performance. According to Philip Thicknesse, who witnessed Kempelen's exhibition in the early days of 1784: "he always places himself close to the right elbow of the Automaton, previous to its move; then puts his left hand into his coat pocket, and by an awkward motion, induces most people to believe, that he has a Magnet concealed in his pocket, by which he can direct the movement of the Turk's arm at pleasure. Add to this, that he has a little cabinet on a side-table, which he now and then unlocks, and locks... and a key to *wind* up the automaton; all of which are merely to puzzle the spectators; For he takes care that they shall see him move his hand and fingers in his pocket, backwards and forwards, on purpose to enforce the suspicion that *he, not an invisible Agent*, is the antagonist against whom you play."<sup>40</sup> Intriguing double decoy. Poe described Maelzel's "peculiar shuffle with his feet, calculated to induce suspicion of collusion with the machine in minds which are more cunning than sagacious. These peculiarities, are, no doubt, mere mannerisms of M. Maelzel, or, if he is aware of them at all, he puts them in practice with a view of exciting in the spectators a false idea of the pure mechanism in the Automaton."<sup>41</sup> The gestures and sound effects of both exhibitor and machine are orchestrated so as to create a conflation or confusion of man and machine, of puppet and puppeteer. Hand and feet are shuffled either in servile replication of the automaton's strategic moves, or in dictatorial codes that are meant to operate the automaton. If the opponent strays from decisiveness, makes a false move disallowed by the rules of the game, all too human, the machine shakes his head

<sup>40</sup> Phillip Thicknesse, *The Speaking Figure and Automaton Chess-Player exposed and detected* (London: John Stockdale, 1784), 10.

vigorously, his machinery no doubt reverberating noisily, and raps briskly on the box with his wooden fingers. Reprimanding the human for lacking in machine-like determination, the Turk brings attention to his own physical constitution, his mechanical inflexibility. If, in turn, the opponent, testing the machine, feints a move which he then retracts the very instant he perceives the preliminary shudder of the automaton's response, the automaton aborts his remaining arm movement.<sup>42</sup> The quiver comes to a halt, and movement is withheld. When the Turk is put in a difficult spot, he does not shake his head or roll his eyes,<sup>43</sup> for he can only rattle when his moves are obvious, that is, when he is machine. When forced to reflect, he is still. Other times, if a chess piece is not properly placed on the square of board, the automaton blindly continues to reach for it, grasp the invisible piece and make his decided move. Here it is the human who must rectify, and the exhibitor performs the evolution which the irreproachable automaton pointed out. Stillness and mobility alternate to create the impression of machinery (or to deflect the accusation of internal puppetry to external mediation). The infinitesimal choreography of the exhibitor's furtive looks, arm movements, footsteps, relate to the movements of the automaton, like, to paraphrase Kleist, "the numbers to their logarithms."

Furthermore, Poe notes: "The countenance evinces no ingenuity, and is surpassed, in its resemblance to the human face, by the very commonest of wax-works. The eyes roll unnaturally in the head, without any corresponding motions of the lids or brows. The arm, particularly, performs its operations in an exceedingly stiff, awkward, jerking and rectangular manner."<sup>44</sup> The automaton intentionally resists realism, as Poe informs us that Maelzel created many other exceedingly realistic automatons. He argues that were the machine more lifelike, the viewer would be more prone to suspect human agency within.<sup>45</sup> Were the outer layer a better 'fit,' the automaton would merely be a Russian-doll-like case. Instead, awkward and rectangular movements convey the idea of pure and unaided mechanism, and likewise, unnatural features evoke an alien configuration of machinery. An android exterior should contain a miniature homunculus; a machine-like exterior should contain a machine-like interior (the calculating engines of Babbage come to mind). The anthropomorphic tendency of the machine should in this view be discarded in favour of austere geometric shapes, imitating man not in appearance but in function (this was indeed the direction the aesthetics of the

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<sup>41</sup> Poe, 17.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 26. As we shall see, the perception and expression of a feint – an affectation of sorts – is, according to Heinrich von Kleist in his essay *On the Marionette Theatre*, a feature typical of the conscious human. Kleist refers to a fencing session with a bear, which, lacking in consciousness, never "followed a feint." Likewise, Poe's description of the automaton perceiving a feint not only proves in his view that "its movements are regulated by mind" (p. 26): i.e. that there is human agency within the chess player, but also that the exhibitor is not that human agent. Logically this presents something of a paradox, in that a feint is only a feint inasmuch as it was perceived to be a motion in temporary earnest.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

machine would eventually opt for<sup>46</sup>). Windisch, on the other hand, had earlier concluded that if this be a deception it is a “happy” one, and beyond its secret “The invention of a mechanical arm, so natural in all its motions, which takes hold of, lifts up, and puts down, the men so gracefully, were it even guided by both the inventor’s hands, would be a matter so difficult in itself, as to be sufficient to establish the reputation of many an artist.”<sup>47</sup> The prosthetic mechanism, in its translation of animate movement to the inanimate, its replication of rhythms, its extension of the arm’s functions, is an admirable ingenuity of itself. The one arm echoes the other arm. According to Thicknesse, the automaton is in truth a kind of glove-puppet: “a living hand... is put into the sleeve of the Turk.”<sup>48</sup> Congruity and simultaneity between the two arms. Thicknesse equally exposes the “*man within a man*,” invisibly cooped up, who sees the game as through a mask, via the hair trimmings in the Turk’s coat, having perceived “motion there, when the figure should have been motionless, had there not been *some life* very near it.”<sup>49</sup> Similarly, in Willis’ illustrations, the man inside is an agile contortionist, constantly evading the spectator’s discernment by scrunching up in different compartments of the automaton. Others suspected that the caged man was himself a young child, a dwarf or a legless cripple,<sup>50</sup> smaller in dimensions to make the cage less claustrophobic. In the later divulged chain of the Turk’s various operators, one of them, Charles F. Schmidt, is quoted in saying “You may imagine my astonishment... he asked me to assist him to lift off the cover of the Automaton, when out stepped Prof. Anderson; who by the by was quite tall. I was of course all eagerness to go in there myself.”<sup>51</sup> As one body gets out, the other excitedly *gets inside*. Not only dissecting the moving statue, prying it apart, but entering its viscera in order to become its animating agent. In these conjectures, the operator was the *living relic* inside the relic box, flesh hiding inside a skeletal armour. Whatever the size of the cramped operator, he would have had to crane his neck upwards to see the moves through the chest, repeat the pattern of the game on his miniature travelling chessboard, then steer the prosthetic limb with a pantograph. Further puppetry was involved in the rolling of the Turk’s eyes, nodding of its head, pulling of the cord that made it say *échec*. The sounds of the writhing animator were muffled by the louder sounds of wheelwork, as well as the cloth lining, which, Poe claims, served “to deaden and render indistinct all sounds occasioned by the movements of the person within.”<sup>52</sup> Likewise, the opponent would be seated on a separate table so as to distance him or her from the sounds of respiration (for although this machine could be thought

<sup>46</sup> Babbage was particularly upset by the domestic triviality of decorative machines, as opposed to the seriousness of his calculating engine. Cf. Schaffer, “Babbage’s Dancer.”

<sup>47</sup> Windisch, 56-7.

<sup>48</sup> Thicknesse, 12.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>50</sup> This is Benjamin’s hypothesis in his “Theses on the Philosophy of History.”

<sup>51</sup> Gaby Wood, *Living Dolls: A Magical History of the Quest for Mechanical Life*, 84. Wood updates the general summary given by Wimsatt. See also James W. Cooke, *The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum* (Cambridge, Mass. London: Harvard University Press, 2001), chapter “The Death and Rebirth of the Automaton Chess Player,” 30-72.

<sup>52</sup> Poe, 33.



to think, it could not be heard to breathe). Just as there were two inventors (Kempelen and Maelzel), there was no 'one' ideal operator or body shape, but a variety of both physiques and postures. This strange machine/automaton/puppet highlighted the knotted discomfort of the restricted human body trying to *be* the inanimate, and in fact some of its operators developed a pronounced stoop, or eventually became paralysed in the limbs, crippled by the straining animation of another a lifeless body (and, perhaps, the gruelling hyperactivity of the mind).<sup>53</sup>

The distinction between various levels of performance, types of gestures, time-spans, is thus polarised in the Turk. In theory, the puppeteer and the puppet share more gestures, more rhythm, and more time, than does the automaton with its operator. For the latter aims at creating a disparity, a visible divide. The less anchored the automated object to its animator, the more it is empowered, both gesturally and temporally. The operator winds into the machine a condensed dose of time, which the machine then embodies and protracts.<sup>54</sup>

It is hardly surprising that our same Maelzel is also credited with the invention of the metronome. The clock, we have seen, haunts the existence of the automaton from its inception, surpassing man in its reliable division of time and marking of rhythm. Indeed, countless music-machines were earlier produced as pleasurable listening experiences, but also, undeniably, as explorations of the rhythmic qualities inherent to the machine. Initially, the rhythm of automata was irregular and organic. It is a rhythm that closely reflects the fluctuating beat of the animate. Vaucanson had insisted that the duck bore no resemblance at all to the famous medieval mechanical masterpieces of Lyons and Strasbourg, the roosters that flapped their wings, raised their head and crowed so as to indicate the time. In other words, he aimed at dissociating his duck, containing inner hidden movements, from the clock, whose main function was to externalise the passing of time; whereas the former implicitly marked its own microcosmic rhythm, the latter struck the rhythm of the macrocosm. The time of the duck, we are told by Vaucanson, is one of animal voracity, "all the actions of a Duck that swallows greedily, and doubles the swiftness in the motion of its neck and throat or gullet to drive the food into its stomach."<sup>55</sup> Like the chess-player, the rhythm is not as regular as clockwork; instead it organically follows the internal motions of thought or the convulsions of digestion. When La Mettrie refers to the human body as a "large watch," he adds "for though one does not tell time by the pulse, it is at least the barometer of the warmth and the vivacity by which one may estimate the nature of the soul."<sup>56</sup> However machine-like, the human body remains inadequate, insufficient, as a time-telling clock. Yes, it palpitates, but its rhythm is not

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Wood on the anecdotal discomforts of the chess-player's operators.

<sup>54</sup> A recurring accusation against the mechanism of the Turk was that the wind-up key was mere decoration, that the exhibitor's touching did not expand through the automaton.

<sup>55</sup> Vaucanson, 21.

consistent, subject to flows and ebbs of passion, fear, sleep, etc.. Perhaps this is why with the invention of the pendulum, the clock, now an accurate, precise and equidistant time-teller, no longer required human resemblance or performance. Having exceeded man in terms of regularity, clockwork could shed its android appearance and choreography in order to become a plain box. The sweeping movements of the arms, the eyes, the head, could be reduced to the far more meticulous and diminutive tic(k)s of the seconds on a face.<sup>57</sup> Jackwork, which postulated a temporal and figurative continuity between man and machine, was gradually abandoned. No longer did it occupy centre-stage as an object of scientific marvel, neither enchanting nor disenchanting. The time at which Poe witnessed the chess-playing automaton was during the early decline of its credibility and its sensationalism. From the start, it was subject to much scepticism and suspicion, and, to use a fortuitous metaphor, one might say the belief mechanism was winding-down.<sup>58</sup> Other more 'genuine' automata, such as the calculating machine to which Poe compares this 'sham,' were becoming unproblematically common-place. Figurative automata were dispersing from the courts of Europe to populate children's toyshops and stage magic.

The complex choreography of showing and hiding was one that structured belief, disbelief, and the willing suspension of disbelief. The accusation of chicanery lurked behind any scientific performance, and exhibitors attempted to dissociate their demonstrations from the enchantment of charlatans. This is a time in which "Empiricism unsettlingly resembled pseudoempiricism."<sup>59</sup> And this was the greatest challenge to the spectator, to perceive the experience *behind* the experience, the *man inside the man*, concurrent to the developments in mesmerism and the interest in the sub- or unconscious, as well as pathologies of multiple-personality.<sup>60</sup> As Steven Connor remarks, the term automaton "always marks out the space of a potential question concerning the life of what it names."<sup>61</sup> Essentially, the automaton appears to comply with the difficult task of simultaneously both hiding and revealing its animating device. One must be able to see the object as simultaneously transparent and obscure, hollow and inhabited, animated and de-animated. This dualism fuels the gestures of display, the grandiloquent key-jingling, door-unlocking and drawer-opening. Like Maelzel when asked whether his automaton was pure machine or not, it is tempting to enigmatically "say nothing

<sup>56</sup> La Mettrie, 141. Cf. Aram Vartanian, *La Mettrie's L'Homme-Machine* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), where the limits of la Mettrie's theory in relation to time are discussed.

<sup>57</sup> This makes for an interesting contrast with the human body's tics and convulsions. As Connor points out, shaking "draws time up into the body... it makes time into a body, an agitated corporeal mass." Steven Connor "The Shakes: Conditions of Tremor," paper given at the Roehampton Institute Department of Drama, 30 March 2000, published online <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/eh/eng/skc/shakes/> (consulted 20 February 2002).

<sup>58</sup> Or was it? Although the secret of the Chess-player was unmasked over and over, the public refused to believe the deceit, and instead continued to pay for the privilege. Charles M. Carroll, *The Great Chess Automaton* (New York: Dover Publications, 1975), 101.

<sup>59</sup> Stafford, *Artful Science*, xxiv.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Schwartz, "The Three-Body Problem" and *The Culture of the Copy*, 81-7.

<sup>61</sup> Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 341.

about it.<sup>62</sup> To illustrate the layering of belief I shall instead resort to yet another master of illusion in the fascinating chain of conjurers debunking their predecessors.

Remarkably, it is most often precisely magicians and illusionists who undertake the task of demystifying the illusions or “miracles” that preceded them. Performances of “superstition” characterised the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as epitomized by the words *Hocus Pocus*, probably a corruption of *Hoc est Corpus*. The magical theatricality of conjuring capitalized on the supposedly superseded miraculous theatricality of the transubstantiation, revised as either philosophical, scientific or recreational experiment. Indeed, following on from the Reformation’s anticlerical, antipapist accusations of the false prodigies of Catholic priesthood, the conjurers of the Enlightenment refashioned magic as an antidote to popular belief in miracles, and legerdemain became a widely distributed commodity of edifying amusement.<sup>63</sup> Popular spectacle aimed to rationalise mystification and expose credulity, although the awe of belief was merely transposed onto the stage, not eradicated. The performer frequently created the illusion of eye-witnessing using the characteristic rhetoric of demonstration, without actually enlightening the spectator as to how it was done. This legacy of Enlightenment performances of unmasking survived well into the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Whenever the supernatural threatened to return to usurp the stage, magicians would be at hand to reveal it as hoax. This is particularly evident with the Spiritualist movement, which began in 1848 in New York with the Fox sisters who claimed to communicate with spirits. They spawned countless spirit mediums who held séances, performed magical tricks, clairvoyance, telekinesis and telepathy, even long after the sisters admitted their fraud some thirty years later. The spirit world left evidence of its existence in a variety of technological media – photographs, telegraphs, etc.<sup>64</sup> – almost as though to undermine the ‘Enlightened’ hollowing of technologically animated objects. Beyond the perceptible hand operating the object beside it, Spiritualism appeared to reconfirm participatory presence *in* or *through* the object. Parallel to the increasingly efficient resurrections enabled by technology, the spirits could animate, communicate or leave pseudo-

<sup>62</sup> Poe, 30.

<sup>63</sup> Many miracles of Christianity survived under the guise of ventriloquism, phantasmagoria, levitations, bodily fragmentation and resurrections. For an excellent survey see Stafford, 73-130; cf. also Leigh Eric Schmidt, “From Demon Possession to Magic Show: Ventriloquism, Religion, and the Enlightenment,” *Church History* 67, 2 (June 1998): 274-304. Grete de Francesco writes that the leaders of the Enlightenment “called upon modern science, and in particular upon technology, to assist them in their battle against the charlatan,” but instead the mythologies they attempted to expell became entrenched in modern science itself. *The Power of the Charlatan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939), 235.

<sup>64</sup> In a way Spiritualism was a form of radical Protestantism, which did away with priesthood and relied on direct communication with the spirits. Technological inventions such as the phonograph and the telegraph coincide with this notion of disembodied voices. On the relation of Spiritualism to the gramophone, see Connor, 362-93; and to other forms of technological developments, Tom Gunning, “Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations: Spirit Photography, Magic Theater, Trick Films and Photography’s Uncanny,” *Fugitive Images from Photography to Video*, ed. P. Petro (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 42-71; “The Ghost in the Machine: Animated Pictures at the Haunted Hotel of Early Cinema,” *Living Pictures: The Journal of the Popular and Projected Image before 1914* 1, 1 (2001): 3-17.

acheiropoietai traces with, through and in objects. The magic theatres of Jean-Eugene Robert-Houdin, John Nevil Maskelyne and others took it upon themselves to expose the supernatural claims of Spiritualism by demonstrating these very same experiences as entertaining magic tricks.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, they set out to debunk fake technologies, sham automata, even as they themselves presented evolved models of the same.

Our opening point was Kempelen's upstaging of Pelletier. In turn, the conjuror Robert-Houdin (from whom the famous escapologist Houdini took his name, as well as demystified his tricks), also a prominent automata-maker, wrote elaborate accounts revealing the trickery behind both the duck and the chess-player. He claimed that Kempelen employed a legless fugitive from Poland named Wourosky, whom he had smuggled out of Russia in the automaton, which served as a Trojan horse of sorts.<sup>66</sup> Of Vaucanson's Duck he wrote that he was given it for repairs. As he dissected the anatomical Duck, he discovered that the faeces were in fact pre-fabricated, not the result of the trituration of grains the Duck had eaten and digested. In both these examples a complex choreography of deceit is assumed, whereby the exhibitor reveals only so as to hide a different level of experience. The sleight-of-hand is nimble and persuasive – undetected but visualised – and the inner machinations complex. In the case of the Duck, the tract of its intestines is revealed as a farce, the excremental consequence of its insides are revealed to be an external fabrication. With the Turk, once again clockwork is undone as puppetry. There is no inner mechanism, only an inner body hiding in an outer body. Magicians, those piercing perpetrators and spectators of illusion, reveal with the authority of the initiated the strata of control and perception. The maestro demonstrates that where there was transparency there is in fact opacity, what was inside is an outside fabrication, and vice versa. They undo one illusion only to unveil another. As David Brewster wrote in 1834 in his *Letters on Natural Magic*, a book dedicated entirely to the

<sup>65</sup> Although of course there had been illusionary spectacles including phantasmagoria, ghost and spirit manifestations before Spiritualism. John Nevil Maskelyne, *Modern Spiritualism: A Short Account of its Rise and Progress, with some Exposures of so-called Spirit Media* (London: Frederick Warne, 1875). Cf. the later Harry Houdini, *A Magician among the Spirits* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1924). The film illusionist Georges Méliès (who took over the Robert-Houdin theatre) also made several early films based on Spiritualism.

<sup>66</sup> In fact the whole pretence of the automaton, according to Robert-Houdin, was simply to smuggle out Wourosky, "the living automaton." This reverses our idea of the automaton containing a miniature replica, for in this version the "hospitable" automaton is merely the carrier case of the Pole. Although Robert-Houdin claims to have seen the automaton in 1844 in France, it must have been an imitation, for the original was in America. Jean-Eugene Robert-Houdin, *Memoirs of Robert-Houdin/Ambassador, Author and Conjuror*, trans. L. Wraxwell (London: Chapman and Hall, 1859), on Vaucanson's duck, 171-5, and on the chess-player 176-90; cf. Linda Strauss, "Reflections in a Mechanical Mirror: Automata as Doubles and as Tools," *Knowledge and Society* 10 (1996): 179-207. Houdini similarly exposed Robert-Houdin, and, in both cases, veracity was often sacrificed for ego.

Maskelyne and Cooke's card-playing automata Psycho, exhibited in 1875, was compared to Kempelen's Turk, which was explained away as containing the legless Wourosky. We are then told of another poor imitation of the Turk called Hajeeb, exhibited at the Crystal Palace, which was even bigger in dimension ("not having the *advantage* possessed by Wouroski, of being without legs"). Psycho, unlike these automata, was small, making it absurd to suppose "that a human being, however small, could be packed into such a limited space and still be able to escape detection." John Nevil Maskelyne & George Alfred Cooke, *The Royal Illusionists and Anti-Spiritualists: A guide to their original and unique entertainment of modern miracles*, pamphlet to accompany their performance at the Egyptian Large Hall, Piccadilly, London, January 11<sup>th</sup>, 1875, 17. Various conjectures are enlisted (electricity, a tamed dog, magnetic arrangements), but all are discarded.

enlightened demystification of any notion of the supernatural, magical, or miraculous, “These mechanical wonders, which in one century enriched only the conjuror who used them, contributed in another to augment the wealth of the nation; and those automatic toys, which once amused the vulgar, are now employed in extending the power and promoting the civilization of our species.”<sup>67</sup> From the capitalist realm of magic to the colonial realm of technology... But this is where we rein in.

Perhaps the most valuable conclusion to be drawn from this intricate game of chess is the function of the hand. Rather than looking at what is *revealed*, we should look to *what* is revealing, to the dexterity of demonstration. Robert-Houdin would write that the conjuror’s wand (not dissimilar to the *ostensor’s* pointer at the dissecting table), saves him from “the consciousness of possessing *arms*, and not knowing what to do with them.”<sup>68</sup> The exhibitor of the automaton shows in order to hide, he bares his hands to avoid the implied manipulation (from *manus*, hand), to distract from the supposed manual intervention. And yet the entire game of chess was characterised by the manoeuvring enabled by the hand: that of the opponent as much as the nimbly prosthetic hand of the Turk, not to mention of his versatile operator. Treadling the threshold between showing technology as performing object and incorporating the object as instrument, the hand is the bridge between animate and inanimate, what gives or denies visibility. To return to Blanchot, utilisation creates invisibility: “a utensil, once it has been damaged, becomes its own image... no longer disappearing in its use, [it] *appears*.”<sup>69</sup> In their non-utilitarian redundancy, automata were highly visible, whilst the hands operating and animating them were immersed in a dextrous vanishing act.



Why does the technological aesthetic of an android favour a body dressed in armour? The hardened jointed shell reveals a different rhythm, a new more grating agility lacking the muffled covering of skin and flesh. This is the bristle movement quality of skeletal insects, angular, jagged, but animate all the same. Insect-like dancers wear prosthetic claws, their bodies transformed into exoskeletons. This is a uniting of animate and inanimate that suggests no cybernetic monster, nor a threatened human body replaced or debilitated by his/her surrogate or prosthesis. This is an extended body, one which dances as though performing a

<sup>67</sup> David Brewster, *Letters on Natural Magic* (London: John Murray, 1834), 286. Stewart writes of a curious reversal whereby mechanical toys “produce a representation of alienated labour... [itself] constructed by artisanal labour. The triumph of the model-maker is that he or she produced the object entirely by hand.” Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke university Press, 1999), 58.

<sup>68</sup> Robert-Houdin, *The Secrets of Conjuring and Magic, or How to become a Wizard*, trans. Prof. Hoffmann (London: Routledge, 1877), 65.

<sup>69</sup> Blanchot, 84.

inating ritual, occasionally stilled into invertebrate armour, other times accelerated in non-mechanical repetitive movements, infinitely varied like the enactment of an itch. The articulated joint is sharp, sword-like, and can be thrown outward like a rapier in a fencing match, although never directed as an attack. A flick backwards and the joint ricochets into a sharp angle. Combined, the dancers might create a multi-legged insect. Their choreographies are constantly slipping out of joint. At times one is stuck in the fluttering of a leg, released by another dancer's almost imperceptible touch. The source of their movements is constantly dislocated, hurtled in and out of each other, to and fro. They alternate between being each other's body; they are wind-up key, puppeteer, puppet, crutch, shadow, echo, twitch to one another – and the same fluctuation is internally present... they are internally to themselves what the other dancer is externally to them.<sup>70</sup>




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<sup>70</sup> Based on Random Dance Company's *Nemesis*, performed at Sadlers Wells, London, March 2002.

## 5

*Puppets and Prostheses**The Inanimate Incarnate*

A figure moves on stage, syncopating between the regularity of gesture and the moments at which gesture breaks free. The *rhythm of this body confesses another rhythm*, collapses out of itself, moving as though it didn't belong within itself. A limb suddenly dies, and the disparity becomes transparent, all I can see is the asymmetry of the dancer's body, its un-oneness. It is as though the body has broken in two, and one part lives on whilst the other succumbs to being dragged, thrown, limp and lifeless. This is not about the surrogate limb that offers to empower whilst threatening to infect the whole body and replace it. Nor is it simply a tale of mastery and slavery, although subjection and control are central facets of the choreography. It is a more subtle narrative, one that touches upon the strange rhythm that a body can take on when it is simultaneously a step ahead and a step behind [of] itself, both dictating and dictated, a body that is carried and carrying, within and without, at once phantom and wholly present. In this body the de-animation of the tableau vivant takes place only partially, in segmented limbs which are then re-animated, brought back to life whilst retaining something of their previous inertia.<sup>1</sup>

From the Turk's suspected puppetry to genuine puppets, the chessplaying prosthesis to actual peg-legs conjoined with the living body. No longer side by side, nor in-side, but coalescing. No longer the denial of any physical contact, implied denied manipulation, but tactile communication as the very starting point, convergence as the primary focus. The inanimate can now encrust itself onto the living body as an instance of performative grace – not a miracle, nor a deceptive illusion. A new aesthetic model emerges: the inception of the *inanimate incarnate*.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> From Russian company BlackSkyWhite's *Bertrand's Toys*, performed at the Purcell Room, London, January 2001.

<sup>2</sup> I borrow the expression from Roman Paska's "The Inanimate Incarnate," *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, vol. 1, 411-428.

An almost breathless memory of a child bouncing up and down on the piece of inanimate wood, the peg-leg that is his father's prosthetic limb:

... this "I" that speaks henceforth out of the caesura of a broken rhythm, punctuating the citation whereby a father fends off his ghosts of pain, thrown into a space above him, the waiting space where I share the anticipation of an unwelcome spasm, it is I who floats in the air inches or miles above him, a rudimentary orbital contraption flying high over a father who could no longer ever jump free of himself and of his mechanical attachment but who wants me to come down with all the certainty of a dependable surrogate, the sensation landing where and when he knows how to prepare for it...<sup>3</sup>

The bouncing-knee game marks a rhythm of separation and unity, of rising and falling, of breaks and continuity. In this memory it serves to amplify a connection of belonging and autonomy between father and son, a son who is both light enough to bounce and old enough to fall, eventually. For now he floats above in a kind of weightless suspension, awaiting the spasm that will jerk him down, off the knee. He floats, the force pulling him upwards being – for an instant – greater than the one that pulls him downwards. I am touched as in this moment it suddenly becomes apparent that the son is parallel to the prosthesis, as though it were his reflection, painfully occupying a similar space, similar height and perhaps inverse weight. The child hovers above, the symmetrical mirror image of the father's anchor to gravity.

It is almost difficult to write about.

The child is undependable, having too much will of his own, therefore not responding to the predictability of weight, of inert matter. The leg, although still at the mercy of sudden convulsions of pain and impulses of nerves, is nonetheless anticipatable. The spasm grieves the loss of the leg, the nerves animated as if by some external force, external that was once internal. The passive limplimbedness that the real leg would have had, had it not been amputated, and the prosthetic leg does have in replacing the lost leg, becomes reliably dependable: it falls and despite the infinite variations of the fall it always falls consistently, there is something mathematical about it. The father bounces it just as much as he bounces his son, and yet the one is more attached to him than the other, it has an axis of belonging that is more geometrical. The leg falls with a limited number of articulations and less variables in its movements. In contrast, the body of the son is almost too much of a body, too complex in

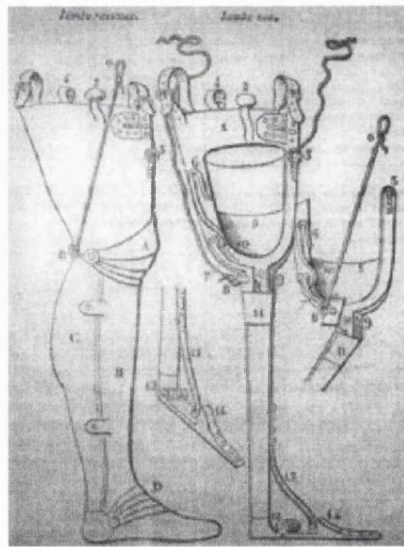
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<sup>3</sup> David Wills, *Prosthesis* (California: Stanford University Press, 1995), 6. I refer to the sections of Wills' book which touch more directly on the autobiographical, which he skilfully intersperses with the more 'theoretical' sections on prosthesis as essential to language, in relation to cyborg literature, Derrida, etc.. I am far more taken by the



its articulation and weight-distribution, too autonomous and self-“standing.” The child is not a crutch to lean on but a “rudimentary orbital contraption,” defying gravity thanks to the gravity-bound piece of leg.

In a multiplicity of languages, David Wills describes his guilt and compassion, his phantom pain for his father's phantom limb. The father's movement animates the leg whilst evidencing its lifelessness; his footfalls fall as he limps between carrying it and letting it go. In the more literal moments of release, of in between-ness, the child would often hold the leg (when the father went for a swim, for example), observe it, watch over it, lie in its place at night (for he is about the same length), make silent pacts with it, regard it with a respect that almost implies it is alive. So long as it is on the father, it is more animate than inanimate, it transubstantiates into the real leg. But even when detached it has a secret life of its own, “It begins at night standing in a corner of the bedroom, holding taut one trouser leg and letting the other fall, while he sleeps, dreaming who knows what dreams of walking straight....”<sup>14</sup> The leg remains in its function of verticality, of support and uprightness, it never sleeps, for it is constantly asleep, inert matter that it is. The leg leans, paused between animation and de-animation. Even propped up against the wall, immobile, it limps, conveying the possibility of walking, letting the other trouser leg fall. Suspended in a vigilant uselessness, the leg now has a phantom body, sleeping in bed. Still, the ‘stand-in’ stands, which is the basic function of a leg.



19. Prosthetic leg from the time of Ambroise Paré (1552).

breathless narrative mode in which he describes his memories of the prosthetic leg than the paused, critical analysis of removed experiences.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

In another place and time, in another text, a different tale of fatherhood and son-hood and a piece of wood. Consider the legs of the puppet Pinocchio, equally stumbling between the rhythms of being wood and becoming real.

At the very beginning of the famous story from 1883, the piece of wood, the future Pinocchio, shows up at the workshop of the Carpenter Master Cherry, who gleefully announces “I think I’ll use it to make a table-leg.”<sup>5</sup> As in chapter 1, the wood potentially undergoes several metamorphoses before becoming ‘idol,’ animated puppet. The Carpenter is about to strike the wood when a little voice cries out for mercy. Already the wood refuses to be a leg or supportive crutch of any kind, as his later adventures will reveal. In comes Geppetto, asking for a piece of wood with which to make himself “a fine wooden puppet... who can dance, and fence, and make daredevil leaps.”<sup>6</sup> Hyper-mobility will undoubtedly characterise this lively puppet. Master Cherry is delighted to rid himself of the piece of wood that gave him such a frightful scare, but just as he was handing it over “the piece of wood gave a strong jolt and, bolting suddenly out of his hands, banged against the thin and shrivelled shins of poor Geppetto... ‘You’ve almost crippled me,’”<sup>7</sup> cries Geppetto. The precariousness of the poverty-stricken father’s ability to stand runs throughout the story (Geppetto then “hobbles” home), as does Pinocchio’s scurrying and his unsupportive, wounding woodenness. Once at home, Geppetto sets out to sculpt this surrogate son. Gradual insolence animates the puppet at the carving of each feature: the eyes stare unashamedly, the nose grows unstoppably, the mouth laughs, the tongue pokes out, the hands snatch his wig, and, as soon as Geppetto finishes limbering the legs and feet, the puppet dashes out and runs away clattering his wooden feet against the pavement. Several times during Pinocchio’s adventures we hear the rattling sound of his wooden body scampering about or dangling in the air. It is Pinocchio’s incapacity to stay still that gets him into trouble time and time again, as though a return to the silence of the ‘pedestal’ were the ultimate threat. His father jailed overnight and hunger taking over, he runs around looking for food, until, worn out, he finally returns home and falls asleep with his legs on top of a brazier full of burning embers. His wooden feet catch fire and turn to ashes, but the inanimate wooden puppet continues in a state of slumber and ‘inanimatedness,’ “snoring as though his feet belonged to someone else,”<sup>8</sup> inert matter that they are. Hearing his father knocking at the door, he jumps down from the stool “but after two or three lurches all at once he fell flat on the floor... ‘I can’t stand up, believe me. Oh poor me, poor me. I’ll have

<sup>5</sup> Carlo Collodi, *The Adventures of Pinocchio: The Complete Text in a Bilingual Edition with the Original Illustrations*, trans. N.J. Perella (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 83. First published as “Storia di un Burattino” in a series of episodes in the children’s journal *Il Giornale per i Bambini* between 1881-83, and re-edited as a book in 1883.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 93. The poverty of the tale is echoed in the name of Pinocchio which refers to the pine nut, which also touches upon his potential eatability (by the green fisherman, great shark, the fish who eat his donkey hide through to the wood, etc.).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 121.

to walk on my knees all my life.”<sup>9</sup> Like the incapacitated idols in chapter 1, accused of being passively hauled, Pinocchio constantly risks returning to wooden and horizontal inanimateness. The puppet pleads with Geppetto to make him new feet, prostheses, promising that in turn he will be “the comfort and staff of your old age”: *about to remain a cripple, he promises to become a crutch*. After a series of adventures all threatening to still him – including being hung from a tree, getting his feet caught in a snare, being chained by a heavy dog collar, getting his foot stuck in a door, being forced on all fours whilst metamorphosing into a donkey, being trained to stand on his hind legs and eventually becoming a lame donkey – finally he is rejoined with his father Geppetto and becomes his crutch: “Just lean on my arm, dear Father, and let’s go on.”<sup>10</sup> As he is on the road to becoming good, in other words, ‘real,’ he even makes his father a wheelchair out of wicker. Mobility and immobility are the alternating themes around which this family drama articulates itself. Pinocchio thus becomes real when he is most supportive, most crutch-like, enabling his father to walk or wheel. Only from his wood-like solidity and support, his vertical angular leg-likeness, can he soften to become a true boy of supple flesh.

“And the old Pinocchio of wood, where could he have gone to hide?”

“There he is over there” answered Geppetto; and he pointed to a large puppet propped against a chair, its head turned to one side, its arms dangling, and its legs crossed and folded in the middle so that it was a wonder that it stood up at all.<sup>11</sup>

The strings are cut, and the useless piece of wood, as Pinocchio is often called throughout the story, turns back to limplimbed puppet. He should be sprawled out on the floor, with nothing to hold him upright now, but somehow, almost miraculously, he stands, though transparently revealing his non-resistance to gravity. Like the prosthetic leg of the father, the piece of wood rests propped up against something else, standing whilst falling, limping though stationary, communicating both uprightness and horizontal yearning, lying on the threshold of being ‘real’ and being ‘of wood,’ inhabiting this dilated pause between animation and deanimation. Pinocchio the wooden puppet, his body now a pile of limbs, becomes the phantom body of Pinocchio the real boy.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 123.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 443. In comparison, Wills relates of his desire to be carried, not carrying: “My only regret here is possibly his greatest, the fact that he cannot carry me when he is relying on his crutch, and so as we retrace steps holding hands across the house I am in a sense carrying him, walking for him, translating his failure to walk right, standing in for the leg he lacks, he robbed of his strength and I of my weakness. Once I am in bed I make a pact with the leg in the corner – if it will let me sleep as I am letting it sleep, I shall agree to return to it the function I have usurped, and neither of us will say a thing when he emerges from his room dressed the next morning in his suit...” Wills, 29. The crutch and the son alternate, rather than become one another.

<sup>11</sup> Collodi, 461.



20. Illustration from Collodi's *Pinocchio*, 1883.

Without delving into the psychological aspect, the father/son relationship in these two discussions of puppets and prosthesis is undoubtedly due to the implied notions of making, begetting, belonging, and ownership. It is easy to see how the strings between the puppet and puppeteer become the umbilical cords through which the latter gives life to the puppet. Likewise, the prosthesis participates in aliveness inasmuch as it is connected to the living body, and mobilised into functioning in place of the absent limb. Autonomy does not yet seem to be an aspiration, or a necessity. Both belong to the figure that animates them, both are visibly engrafted onto the living body, both are projections, protrusions, surrogates, *hanging from the body like an object that has not yet freed itself from its maker*.

Taken a step further, the father/son relation stretches to the diametric opposition between the God and the Puppet, between infinite consciousness or the body which has none. This is the enigmatic conclusion of the German Romantic Heinrich von Kleist in his short essay from 1810, "On the Marionette Theatre,"<sup>12</sup> which reflects on the superiority of the inanimate puppet

<sup>12</sup> "Über das Marionettentheater" was originally published in several instalments in the *Berliner Abendblätter*, 12-15 December 1810. The quotes that follow combine several translations: Heinrich von Kleist, "On the Marionette Theatre," *An Abyss Deep Enough: Letters of Heinrich von Kleist with a Selection of Essays and Anecdotes*, ed. and trans. B. Miller (New York: Dutton, 1982), 211-16; *Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. D. Constantine (London: J.M. Dent, 1997), 411-16; *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, vol 1, trans. R. Paska (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 415-420. There's a vast number of critical essays attempting to resolve the riddle of this text. To name just a few of the most interesting and useful in this context: Hélène Cixous, "Grace and Innocence: Heinrich von Kleist," *Readings: The Poetics of Blanchot, Joyce, Kafka, Kleist, Lispector, and Tsvetayeva*, trans. V.A. Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 28-73; Cixous, "Les Marionnettes: Lecture de Kleist, Le dernier chapitre de l'histoire du monde," *Prénoms de Personne* (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1974): 127-152; Stefani Engelstein, "Out on a Limb: Military Medicine, Heinrich von Kleist, and the disarticulated body," *German Studies Review* 23, 2 (2000): 225-244; Helmut Schneider, "Standing and Falling in Heinrich von Kleist," *MLN* 115, 3 (2000): 502-518; Schneider, "Deconstruction of the Hermeneutical Body: Kleist and the Discourse of Classical Aesthetics," *Body and Text in the Eighteenth Century*, eds. V. Kelly and D. von Mücke (California: Stanford University Press, 1994), 209-226; Helmut Sembdner (ed.), *Kleist's Aufsatz über das Marionettentheater* (Berlin: Schmidt Verlag, 1967). The less useful texts, which seem to reflect more on whether the text is indeed seminal or not, or analyse it in terms of its form being self-reflective on its content, are: William Ray, "Suspended in the Mirror: Language and the Self in Kleist's *Über das*

over the live dancer. Consciousness is mapped onto choreography, and this translation is topographically visualised in the contact between the hand and the animated object. Whereas with the automaton the acute observer attempted to disprove the possibility of a machine emulating human movement and thought, now the same inanimate puppet's movements and unconsciousness (thus confirming its incapacity for thought and animation) become a model of grace to aspire to. Inaugurating the aesthetic shift that would see the actor emulate the puppet (cf. chapter 6), rather than vice versa, Kleist's text, as slippery as it is rich, can be read as a wonderfully articulate description of the patterns of weight-shifting and the dance aesthetics that emerge from the agitating of an inanimate object.

Until now we have focused on the mirroring of the puppet/prosthesis with a real counterpart, the intersections or exchanges between them, the instant of crutch-like stability that the 'leaning on' enables towards locomotion. In Kleist's essay a different perspective unravels through the description of the reverberation of movement through the inanimate. The dialogue between dancer and narrator serves as the frame for the discussion on the mechanics of control and lack of it. How does the puppeteer (whom Kleist calls the "Maschinist") translate movement to his puppet? How is it "possible to govern [the puppet's] separate limbs and particular points"? How can a minimal gesture dilate into a myriad of movements, an animate hand contract lightly to produce a shuddering expansion? If the limbs simply respond to gravity, does the puppeteer not require any choreographic knowledge in order to produce dance? The answer according to Kleist is a combination of straight lines, curves, ellipses. The minor twitches of the hand trickle down and the puppet is torn to movement in the conflict between vertical pull and push, the relation of the fingers to the puppet being "rather like that of numbers to their logarithms or the asymptotes to the hyperbola." Some form of freedom, of autonomy, could eventually be attained, "the last remnant of intelligence...taken out of the marionettes," although in truth this would simply mean that the strings be replaced by the mechanical gesture of "turning a handle." Until that mindless eventuality, movement takes place through the projection of the operator into his marionette, who must dance (not "wholly without feeling") through the object, though hovering over it quite motionless.

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*Marionettentheater*," *Studies in Romanticism* 18 (1979): 521-546 (contains a useful summary of previous scholarship); Paul de Man, "Aesthetic Formalization: Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater*," *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: University of Colombia Press, 1984), 263-90; Cynthia Chase, "Models of Narrative: Mechanical Doll, Exploding Machine," *The Oxford Literary Review* 6, 2 (1984): 57-69; Brittain Smith, "Pas de Deux; Doing the Dialogic Dance in Kleist's fictitious Conversation *About the Puppet Theatre*," *Compendious Conversations: The Method of Dialogue in the Early Enlightenment*, ed. K.L. Cope (Frankfurt am Main, Bern, New York, Paris: Peter Lang, 1992), 368-381; Jena Osman, "The Line and the Arc: An Analogical Discussion of Kleist's 'On the Marionette Theatre,'" *A Poetics of Criticism*, eds. Julian Spahr et al. (Buffalo, New York: Leave Books, 1994), 223-236; Ilse Graham, "Concerning the Theology of Puppets: 'Über das Marionettentheater,'" *Heinrich von Kleist: Word into Flesh: A Poet's Quest for the Symbol* (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1977), 11-26; Walter Silz, "Über das Marionettentheater," *Heinrich von Kleist: Studies in his Works and Literary Character* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1961), 69-85; H.M. Brown, "Kleist's 'Über das Marionettentheater': 'Schlüssel zum Werk' or 'Feuilleton'," *Oxford German Studies* 3 (1968): 114-125; Bernard Franco, "From Popular Genre to Aesthetic Model: The Marionette Theatre according to Kleist," *Études Germaniques* 54, 3 (1999): 391-413.

Each movement, he told me, has its centre of gravity; it is enough to control this within the puppet. The limbs, which are only pendulums, then follow mechanically of their own accord, without further help. He added that the movement is very simple. When the centre of gravity is moved in a straight line, the limbs describe curves. Often shaken in a purely haphazard way, the puppet falls into a kind of rhythmic movement which resembles dance.

Like some anthropomorphic mobile or kinetic sculpture, a gust of wind or a shake is enough to set the thing in motion. Limbs are pendulums, or rather, the entire object is a series of jointed pendulums of which the torso, we imagine, is the heavier centre. Gravity dictates the choreography, which is at once mathematically predictable and subject to chance. But the essence of puppets is a precise tension between the “force that raises them into the air” and the anchor of weight that “draws them to the ground.” The upward tug must be the stronger (contrary to the grounding of the prosthesis), but ultimately it is the delicate balance between the two forces that lies at the foundations of the puppet’s existence and gives it its charm. The pull from above that enables it to sway to and fro is also what can give it the dead and inert appearance of a lynched corpse or, if let go, of a limp fallen figure at the bottom of a staircase. The limbs of the marionette are, according to the dancer, “what they should be: dead, mere pendula, and simply obey the law of gravity.” This suspension is what positions the puppet at a fascinating conjunction between stillness and mobility.

The novelty of Kleist’s reading of the marionette figure is in his shift away from the traditional focus on metaphorical mastery and slavery, to the ways in which control and lack of it are physically embodied, giving the choreography of the jointed puppet an unprecedented conspicuousness. Like the Pinocchio story, which decelerates through the trapping or stilling of the puppet on the run, Kleist’s essay follows a curious pattern of acceleration and fossilization, concentrating for the most part on the lower half of the body and its connection to the floor. The movement that he so eloquently describes is often on the verge of quietening itself, and at times it is precisely this economy of stillness that aligns itself with a marked instance of grace, or non-grace. In the short anecdotes that follow throughout the dialogue, each reaches a punctuation mark, a moment of immobility centred on an impetus or an off-balance. Thus, in the first encounter between the dancer and the narrator, the former asks the latter if he hadn’t found “the dance movement of the puppet (particularly the smaller ones) very graceful... A group of four peasants dancing the rondo in quick time couldn’t have been painted more delicately by Teniers.” The playful diminutive status of the puppet is emphasised in relation to its human ‘original,’ as, being lighter, they are less subject to gravity and to all appearances swifter in their movements. Nonetheless, their firefly velocity introduces the first stilling, as the quickness of their miniature movements is flattened,

captured into a painting by Teniers. The grace of the peasant's delicate flitting and darting is expressed through a comparison with the static image.

This momentary fixity takes a small step, looks back, and becomes imprisonment. Indeed, in the same breath as the comparison between dancers and marionettes, the dancer describes a choreography of Daphne and Apollo, a narrative of metamorphosis, her fleeing away only to become rooted and soil-bound. "Pursued by Apollo, she turns to look at him. At this moment her soul appears to be in the small of her back. As she bends, she looks as though she is about to break, like a naiad from the school of Bernini." Passion, not gravity, is the dictating force here. In his pursuit, he draws her to him, pulling the reins of an invisible string tied as it were to her back. Her soul is displaced, disharmonious with the centre of gravity, and her turning becomes a grotesque twist which hardens her body rather than continuing the movement, stiffened to look as though she were on the verge of snapping. She is turned into a Bernini-esque sculpture, but here the sculptural parallel evokes an instant of non-grace, of becoming inert matter that, instead of swaying, might crack.

The marionette never fossilizes completely, as it uses the ground only to glance over it, "like elves, the momentary halt lends the limbs a new impetus." The pause, always looming, is fleeting, a mere brushing. The heavy weight of inert matter that human dancers experience lasts longer than that of the marionette, it becomes instead a moment of rest and recovery from the "exertion of movement." So much so that it is the oncoming of a stillness which Kleist calls non-dance. 'Leaning' is here not a propelling force into motion, but a threat of immobilisation, a re-incorporation into the pedestal.

The next anecdote, this time offered by the narrator, relates the loss of grace of a youth. The narrator is with him at the baths when the youth catches a glimpse of his reflection in the mirror whilst drying a leg, and, in true *tableaux vivants* tradition, is reminded of the classical statue of the "Dornauszieher," the Spinario or thorn-puller. Again, this is an impulse of movement towards instability, lifting his foot in order to remove the painful spine that otherwise would force him to limp. And again, the flash of grace is caught through the resemblance with a static image "recently seen in Paris...The cast of the statue is well-known; you see it in most German collections." The youth comments on his discovery, but the narrator denies it, though he too had noticed it at the same instant. The youth is incapable of reproducing the pose, of being yet another cast of the proliferated sculpture. Gradually, his repeated attempts make him lose his poise, and paralysis sets in: "An invisible and incomprehensible power seemed to settle like a steel net over the free play of his gestures." His fleeting likeness to a statue representing not a pedestal-bound stance but a moment of potential one-leggedness, recalls the mid-air steps of the Teniers dancers or of Daphne's

attempted escape. Ensnared in a web of self-consciousness, his attractions “slip” away from him, as though each pulsating movement led inevitably to his winding down, a coagulation that ends in corroded solidification (but *not* statue-ification).

The last story describes a fencing match between the dancer and a tamed bear. The dancer wins a match with a young student, who in turn dares him to fight with the bear his father had been rearing in a shed. The bear’s fighting posture was “standing upright on his hind legs, his back against the post to which he was chained, his right paw raised ready for battle.” The quadruped animal is taught to stand like a biped, a classic lesson of domestication to which even Pinocchio was subject during his incarnation as a donkey. It implies using the body against its natural distribution of balance, lifting two feet of four, as opposed to one of two. The bear barely moves, parrying the dancer’s accelerated thrusts and feints with an economy of movements that border on stillness. Like the puppet, he remains anchored to his post, as though this were the pivot that secures his uprightness, without which he would collapse back into the four-footed animal kingdom. Here, being upright is disabling.

A tense intersection of both immobility and contained dynamic of motion emerge from these stories of standing on one leg (or hind legs). After all, legs are the stipulation for verticality and locomotion. It is as though with the one leg the swaying of the pendulum were to stop and hang still, ready for the next propulsion. The prosthetic leg of the father, awaiting the next walking spree, propped against the wall, fallen yet standing, is a perfect embodiment of this split sense of movement. The puppet, the prosthesis, and the manoeuvring body itself, oscillate between hardened erectness and collapsed pliability.

The figure of the puppet itself hangs suspended between these two states of precipitation and retention. It falls while it stands: this is its basic condition.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps Kleist’s fascination with the figure of the marionette stems from the very fact that whilst the figure asserts itself as limplimbed inert dead matter, subject to the heavy laws of gravity, it creates in the viewer an effect of resurrection, of animation, of life. Kleist was deeply moved by this vital image of rising amidst the fall, indeed whilst falling. In a letter from the 16 November 1800, he wrote to his fiancée describing a powerful caving in of two walls, collapsing at precisely the same time and thus forming an arch.<sup>14</sup> This image of architectural, almost choreographic cohesion gave him undescrivable consolation in a moment of existential crisis, and the two-way

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<sup>13</sup> Standing/falling is central to the performances of Vanessa Beecroft and Howard Barker discussed in the previous chapters.

<sup>14</sup> In his letter to Wilhelmine, Kleist writes, “Why, I asked myself, does this arch not collapse, since after all it has *no support*? It remains standing, I answered, *because all the stones tend to collapse at the same time* – from this thought I derived an indescribably heartening consolation, which stayed by me right up to the decisive moment: I too would not collapse, even if all my support were removed!” Kleist, *An Abyss Deep Enough*, 76.



movement of falling/standing runs throughout his entire oeuvre.<sup>15</sup> *True 'standing' seems to occur only in those fleeting moments when a posture takes shape amidst the chaos of falling.*

In these accounts of one-leggedness, Kleist's almost shameful introduction of the theme of cripples and prosthesis seems inevitable.<sup>16</sup> Kleist's entire oeuvre circles around problems of natural body, gesture, mimicry, and war, culminating in extreme physical disarticulation. His interest in war and its aftermath was rooted in personal experience gained during his tenure as a Prussian officer from 1792-1799. The speaker lowers their gaze<sup>17</sup> as early on the dancer asks the narrator if he has heard of the mechanical limbs craftsmen make for those unfortunates who lose their limbs. Not having heard of them, the dancer answers:

"A pity... for if I tell you that those poor people can dance with them I am almost afraid you will not believe me. – Dance? What am I saying? The range of movements is limited, I grant you; but those they are capable of they execute with an ease, grace and poise that every thinking person must be astonished by."

I remarked, in jest, that there he had found the man he was looking for. For a craftsman capable of making such a remarkable leg would no doubt be able to construct him a whole marionette to his requirements.

As we saw with the Turk, the step from prosthesis to marionette is a small one, a simple dilatation of the limb into the body. Throughout the dialogue a series of reversals of mimesis is suggested, from the attempt of the viewer to replicate the cast of the Spinario, for example, to the puppet, the delightful miniature of its operator. The object's imitation of life changes direction, and it is now life that attempts to imitate the object, that seems to yearn for the advantages of the inanimate. However, this aspiration is virtually unreachable, as demonstrated by the failure of the youth. Indeed, elsewhere the dancer asserts that it would be almost impossible for a human body to even equal the marionette. The prosthetic limb is introduced almost as some kind of compromise yielding to the human body's incapacity, a concession that relies precisely on incapacity, on the body's inadequacy as a starting point. Prostheses in Kleist are merely visible signs of the hidden fractures inherent to the human body

<sup>15</sup> A useful overall survey of this imagery in the rest of his works has been written by Helmut Schneider, "Standing and Falling in Heinrich von Kleist," *MLN* 115, 3 (2000): 502-518.

<sup>16</sup> De Man brings up the recurring theme of violence throughout the essay, a procession of mutilated bodies, to which he then adds "one should avoid the pathos of an imagery of bodily mutilation and not forget that we are dealing with textual models, not with the historical and political systems that are their correlate." ("Aesthetic Formalization," 289.) On the contrary, like Engelstein in his article "Out on a Limb" (and Marjorie Garber's "Out of Joint"), I think that the emphasis is Kleist's own.

<sup>17</sup> The entire narration is characterized by a series of downward movements, from the sitting down of the narrator at the start of their conversation, to the downward gazes towards the puppets or at moments of embarrassment, to the descending route to the shed with the bear. This complements the key discourse of the biblical fall from grace. Similarly, high-art and popular culture are pitted against one another (dance/puppetry; fencing/bear-baiting; museum/baths), with a prioritising of the 'lower' forms.

and human understanding.<sup>18</sup> This maimed body is the possible human equivalent of the marionette, where puppet-ness has already developed in a limb, and might gradually advance into the rest of the body, replaced bit by bit by the same craftsman who made the first limb. The one-leggedness of all the figures populating the dialogue tend towards this mimesis in the direction of object-hood, an imbalance quavering between motion and stillness, one foot mid-air, the other fossilized into the pedestal of gravity.

Why this preference for the marionette over the living dancer, we ask together with the narrator, almost taken aback by the audacity of such a statement by a dancer seemingly expressing a death wish of his art, of his body. The advantage is, in the first place, “a negative one... that it would be incapable of *affectation*.” The inanimate body, simplified in its movements, responding only to the vertical axis of up and downward pulls, would not be subject to sideways longings, would not express magnetism, attraction, affinity towards another object of desire. The prosthetic limb cannot reach out, implies Kleist pitilessly. It cannot suffer from the adornments of affectation. The prosthesis is not an ornament, it is a replacement that responds to the needs of the kinetic body (or the aesthetic one, aspiring to visible wholeness), not to the emotional or conscious one, that freezes in yearning, falling outside itself in falling for the other. The gestures of the puppet, like those of the prosthetic limb, are absorbed in mechanics, not longing. The acting of desire expressed by inner tension in the magnetism between Daphne and Apollo (or Paris and Venus) is eviscerated in the relation of the puppet and the puppeteer. “The arm and hand do not reach over to the role and the partner in a gesture of seductive representation, but they are reduced to their operating function,” writes Schneider.<sup>19</sup> The “soul (*vis motrix*)” is not displaced into the back or elbow as with humans; in the puppet it remains centred, subject to gravity. Nor can such displacement take place with the prosthetic limb.

A cripple dance? “What am I saying?” The cruelty of the dancer’s unsaying clarifies that, all the same, the human equivalent is in Kleist’s view a failed one. These are but small tasters of dance, of puppetry, object manipulation, interspersed with moments of non-dance, of rest, of weight-shifting. This is a “balancing act performed by the body, a shift or transfer between the body and its exteriority.”<sup>20</sup> If the puppet is a duplicate projection, relatively autonomous from the body of the puppeteer, the prosthesis is a smaller projection, a replacement stemming from the desire for wholeness and ease of movement (like the statuary relic, ‘fleshing out’ absence). It is in a sense less exterior than the puppet, more incarnated in the flesh. Kleist’s main

<sup>18</sup> Such is also the conclusion of Marquard Smith in “The Uncertainty of Placing: Prosthetic Bodies, Sculptural Design, and Unhomely Dwelling in Marc Quinn, James Gillingham, and Sigmund Freud,” *The Prosthetic Aesthetic. New Formations* 46 (forthcoming 2002). The body is always already “apart, a part, an arrangements of parts.”

<sup>19</sup> Schneider, “Deconstruction of the Hermeneutical Body,” 219

<sup>20</sup> Wills, 20.

emphasis is on the upward pull from above, rendered visible in the way in which the feet merely glance over the ground. It is only here that he hints at the downwardly stabilising socket as a secondary option. Although the prosthesis hangs as it were down from the body, the pendular movement works not from above but from below.

When the children whisper at bed-time, they hear the rhythm of the father's angry "prosthetic gallop" coming towards their room:

they listen to the amplifying iambic beat as he advances with his remarkable sprint, the wooden leg serving as a pivot while the other does all the energetic work, he propels himself rather than runs, always veering slightly off centre then correcting just in time, dealing with the sideways as well as the forward momentum, the instinctive compensation that flesh makes for the rebound that comes when rigid steel strikes the unyielding ground, it is *that opposition of soft and hard that sets the metre*, except that it does not quite have the regularity of iambic feet, there is a slight syncopation, a pause between the strong and weak beats as the shift occurs from one to the other, such that the shift itself almost has a beat of its own, shifting rhythm slightly towards the epic dactylic mode as he bounds toward the bedroom...<sup>21</sup>

The leg is a pivot, the step of propulsion, the anchor around which the ground is effectively skimmed. To recall Kleist, "the momentary halt lends the limbs a new impetus." The rhythm of this body is one that must be constantly corrected, where the soft flesh goes at one pace and the hard steel at another. Each step rectifies the other, compensates directionality and motion. One movement shudders into the next, reciprocating different tempos, revealing a negotiation between two consistencies, two responses to movement and gravity, two ways of stepping. One hears the split very clearly. Even though visually the prosthesis aims at imperceptible fusion, acoustics render it visible. The alternating sounds of carrying and being carried create a rhythmic 'tap dance' of sorts: the lifting and dropping of the hard matter onto the unyielding drum that is the floor, and the propelling bounce of the live leg. Even when not galloping, when standing almost still, simply swaying slightly, the father "builds up to a mechanical twitch, whereby the apparent fluidity of movement enacted by the human body is revealed as something more like the jerk of a cog or a piston."<sup>22</sup> The father experiences joy when cycling, perhaps freed from the sounds of percussion and intervals, translated into the continuous whiz of wheels.

The prosthesis' bodily movement is often called mechanical, but it is so in the Kleistian sense, not yet the cyborg one. The leg is not robotic, replacing the tedium of repetitive and strenuous operations. Although it 'stands in' for a function, it retains human resemblance (like the

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 25

automaton) without slipping into pure instrumentality – it does *not* disappear in its use, but appears visible enough so as not to draw attention to its inanimate self reintegrating the animate body. It is more humble than the robot; it lives with the body's weariness, sleeps with it (albeit propped against the wall), does not exceed it but accompanies it through movement. Although they are leashed to their owners, *the prosthesis and the puppet are not slaves*.<sup>23</sup> The sounds they make are not the industrial sounds of mechanization, but rather the sounds of gravity affecting an inanimate object, the clanking of matter one might hear when a puppet is shaken, interspersed with the sound of human footfalls.

Kleist's essay touches upon the mutual interaction of the living body and the inanimate object, a reciprocal yearning cum absorption: by nature the puppet, looking upwards to its maker, aspires like Pinocchio to become (or at least appear) real, whilst the live dancer looks down and mourns for a state of puppet-hood. An object is painted, sculpted, made to imitate the live pulsation of flesh; in turn, the body looks back at its image and yearns itself object. Maybe Kleist wanted to rid the human body of its painful sentiency. Perhaps, to return to Scarry, the prosthetic leg absorbs the pain of the father's body, and likewise the father absorbs something of the immunity of the prosthetic leg.

Thus, the reversal of inside and outside surfaces ultimately suggests that by transporting the external object world into the sentient interior, that interior gains some small share of blissful immunity of inert inanimate objecthood; and conversely, by transporting pain out onto the external world, that external environment is deprived of its immunity to, unmindfulness of, and indifference toward the problem of sentience... it is part of the work of creating to deprive the external world of the privilege of being inanimate.<sup>24</sup>

The prosthetic leg implies the violence done to it, it knows of its phantom 'other,' hurts with it, for it, protects the memory of it like a hard and unbreakable shell. This agnostic animism is embedded in all made artefacts.<sup>25</sup> The same projection might explain the violence inflicted on so many puppet characters, which seem to suffer the violent bashings that only inanimate matter can withstand (think of the cruel bodily punishments of Pinocchio, or the domestic violence in Punch and Judy). They too seem to readily scapegoat the hardships of having 'a

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>23</sup> As we saw in the introduction, Mark Seltzer refers to "the double logic of prosthesis": *panic* at the dismemberment of the natural body and lack of human agency; *exhilaration* at the extension of human agency through technology. *Bodies and Machines*, 157. In my emphasis one does not truly experience either, as the puppet/prosthesis is not yet, in this context, technological labour.

<sup>24</sup> Scarry, 285.

<sup>25</sup> According to Scarry, the made object knows of its maker and reflects a choreography of perception (thus a chair is mimetic of sentient awareness, it "knows" of the problem of body weight that it resolves), 288-96. Similarly, Miguel Tamen discusses ways in which objects undergo "personification" and are thus made liable, endowed with intentions, "sued, tried, convicted (but probably not acquitted), exiled, executed and rehabilitated." *Friends of Interpretable Objects* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2001), 79.

body.' Their articulation gives them just enough mobility to disperse the blows without cracking, without breaking as would the solid statue or the frail human body.

The body that unites with or extends itself through the inanimate object longs for this reciprocation, this exchange of vulnerability and immunity, soft and hard, conscious and unconscious. These reciprocations, not entirely consummated, create the sounds of carrying and being carried, the broken rhythms of the body that is at once host and parasite, thrusting ahead and lingering behind itself.



We have moved through the two-ness of the puppet/puppeteer and the split one-ness of the body with a prosthesis, both professing an estranged rhythm in their reactions to gravity. There are bodies that interiorise both these states without such a visible divide. Barely discernible, still, like the father's prosthetic walk, this state seeps through in rhythm. After Kleist, the aesthetics of 'mechanical' movement is theorised as producing in the observer a reaction that can swerve into the territory of either the 'comic' or the 'uncanny,' according to Henri Bergson and Ernest Jentsch, both writing around the same early decade of the 1900's.

The youth who lost his grace in the unachievable tableau vivant repeats the ghost of the Spinario pose in desperate over-activity: "In confusion he raised his foot a third time, a fourth, again and again, a dozen times: in vain." The narrator finds this failed repetition is "so comical I could scarcely refrain from laughing at him." What appears to cause laughter is the ridiculous futility of such replication, the gesture that circulates over and over upon itself, flailing towards a stiffening and winding down, as opposed to some sense of progression. The same can be said of the flustered fencers, first the student, then the dancer, who become enervated in their hyper-kinetic attempt to re-stabilize themselves.

In his essay on laughter, Bergson explains this effect as due to a "lack of elasticity... absentmindedness... a kind of physical obstinacy, *as a result, in fact, of rigidity or of momentum.*"<sup>6</sup> Bergson's notion of laughter articulates itself around a web of tension and elasticity, and laughter is in his view a social correction that aims at softening rigidity, whilst in itself creating a relaxing effect on the laugher. The human body should be in a constant state of "wideawake adaptability" and "living pliability," yet it often slips into a state of absentminded mechanical inelasticity, automatism and involuntary movement. Fundamentally, this unsociability is ridiculed and corrected by laughter, whose humiliation is

intended to soften the social body from its distraction and solidification.<sup>27</sup> It is as though in Bergson the body is constantly on the verge of slipping outside of itself and coagulating, curdling towards a stand-still, losing vital mobility and jointed articulation. Unfortunately for the youth, the narrator's laughter fails to soften his body, as instead a steel net immobilises and rigidifies his body. Indeed, if in Bergson the corrective aims at recuperating consciousness, regaining a forgotten awareness, in Kleist the hypothetical return to grace would involve precisely the opposite: a loss of consciousness, a state of regained innocence and lack of self-awareness.<sup>28</sup> The laughter of the narrator could be said to be directed at the youth's self-consciousness, not his lack of it.

Regardless of this difference, Bergson's theory of laughter is also a useful measure of the body that splits within itself, that confesses another rhythm. Puppetry inevitably comes up, as it is par excellence a body that is stiff despite its mobility. Anything that makes one view the living body as a marionette creates a laughable impression. When we see man as a "jointed puppet" we try to rid him of his stiffness; educate him, as the adventures of Pinocchio illustrate at length, into a state of pliable sociability. This stiffness must expose itself whilst remaining dormant.

The suggestion must be a clear one, for inside the person we must distinctly perceive, as through a glass, a set-up mechanism. But the suggestion must also be a subtle one, for the general appearance of the person, whose every limb has been made as rigid as a machine, must continue to give us the impression of a living being. The more exact these two images, that of a person and that of a machine, fit into each other, the more striking is the comic effect....<sup>29</sup>

The man-machine paradigm is taken to its aesthetic extreme, and, according to Bergson, evokes laughter. The body must be at once transparent and opaque, still alive yet on the brink of object-hood. The perception of strings or springs working behind/within the figure conveys a twofold movement quality, negotiating simultaneously autonomy and lack of agency. The seemingly strings-free person seems to be controlled by something subtly external to it, laced with invisible threads that enable some other force and rhythm to overtake it, thus revealing both the downward pull of inert matter and the upward tug of the operator. Movement becomes somewhat automatic, predictable, lifeless, though still moving and to all appearances

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<sup>26</sup> Henri Bergson, "Laughter," 1900, *Comedy*, intro. W. Sypher (Baltimore & London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1980), 61-190, 66.

<sup>27</sup> In Bergson, automated movement in itself is actually a tragic aspect of human existence (not unlike Marx), which can turn into the comical, but is not essentially comic. I am grateful to Ruth Blue for enabling me to read the sections on Bergson in her as yet unpublished PhD *Circles and Repetitions: Habit and the Unconscious*, Diss. Slade, UCL, 2002.

<sup>28</sup> The famous finale of Kleist's essay reads: "grace will be most purely present in the human frame that has either no consciousness or an infinite amount of it, which is to say either in a marionette or in a god....we have to eat again of the Tree of Knowledge to fall back into the state of innocence."

<sup>29</sup> Bergson, 80.

alive – *the inanimate establishes itself in life and imitates it*. It as though parts of the body have been numbed, have fallen asleep and no longer express the pulsation of animation. If only we were always attentive, wide-awake, body alert, “nothing within us would ever appear as due to the workings of strings or springs. The comic is that side of a person which reveals his likeness to a thing.”<sup>30</sup>

Yet it is not so much the stilling of the entire body as much as the hardening of the articulations, the obtrusive jointed-ness of the body. Rather than motionless inertia setting in, the asperity of the body reveals itself precisely through movement and through breakages in the flows of mobility. The limbs may be rigid but they remain pliable. Again, it is a question of rhythm. For “gestures can only be imitated in their mechanical uniformity, and therefore in what is alien to our living personality.”<sup>31</sup> With the exception of stillness, humans can only imitate the inanimate through gestures that communicate a beat estranged from their own pulsations. Rhythm is what conveys this split body: the interspersion (or even dissimulation) of an erratic, irregular, impulsive pattern, with the reliable, regular, and uniform correction of a piece of wood. Where we perceive something mechanical encrusted onto the living, we perceive a limp.

The comic effect can be produced by the human body that leans towards object-hood and mechanisation. It steps out of synch with the ebb and flow of the social body, and starts to lack resilience. Its movement becomes more regular, broken, full of paced intervals where an arrhythmia slips through. The same body confesses a different pace, a second body, coinciding with the first one, fitting in with it as perfectly as possible, so that the parallel vision of the puppet and the puppeteer juxtapose into one single image, and the prosthesis and the body are seemingly one. The implied automatism is not of the mechanical machine kind, but a combination of involuntary movements dictated by the sheer force of weight and gravity. This is Kleist’s definition of the mechanical: not functional, perfunctory, preset, robotic, but choreographic, responding only to the laws of gravity (a subtler version of a perpetual motion machine). Bergson too seems here to refer to the mechanical as something that is still in the realm of aesthetics, of shapes, sequences and rhythms. In both authors, the descriptions can serve as potential guidelines for actors, dancers, comedians. Thus, the difference between the marionette and the automaton becomes not so much human agency but human rhythm. In the marionette the choreography of the human body is echoed through the strings like nervous fibres, albeit translated into a different configuration. In the automaton it is more discontinuous, it hitches, awaiting the next cranking. As Cixous points out in her writing on Kleist, the automaton is distinct from the puppet in its rhythm: in the former “a coarse

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

interruption of movement pervades. But with the marionette, motion is continuous.”<sup>32</sup> The comical effect theorised by Bergson is not limited to one or the other. It is more simply a discernment of inelasticity, the tight fit of a second body encrusting itself onto the first one, which causes laughter.

Not so in the writings of Jentsch on the *Unheimlich*. Jentsch was the first to tackle the aesthetic implications of the Uncanny, and Freud was greatly indebted to him in his seminal essay on the subject.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, Freud starts by following Jentsch’s idea that the uncanny appears in the confusion between animate and inanimate, such as “waxwork figures, ingeniously constructed dolls and automata... Dismembered limbs... feet that dance by themselves... capable of independent activity.”<sup>34</sup> But eventually Freud discards this idea to oscillate instead between the familiar and the unfamiliar (or rather the resurfacing of repressed beliefs). Jentsch, on the other hands, views the uncanny as a “lack of orientation,” an uncertainty and doubt as to whether an apparently living being is inanimate, and conversely, whether a lifeless object may not in fact be animate.<sup>35</sup> In the first instance, he seems to imply that an internal physical uncertainty leads to the perception of uncertainty in the outside world. The effect of the uncanny is therefore greater in those of a nervous disposition, experiencing “deadening of all kinds,” such as “light sleep... forms of depression and after-effects of terrible experiences, fears... severe cases of exhaustion or general illness.”<sup>36</sup> It is as though the perceiving body itself partakes in the effect it observes in or projects onto the outside world. The body that doubts as to the animate or inanimate character of something external to itself, is per se experiencing this hazy numbness and indistinction as a body.

Though using a similar set of juxtaposed elements to those employed by Bergson, here doubt rules in the relation of the inanimate to the animate. If in the laughter essay the suggestion must be at once “clear” and “subtle,” here, so long as doubt remains, the effect lingers. When knowledge dissipates doubt, Jentsch’s uncanny evaporates into clarity and intellectual mastery.

<sup>32</sup> Cixous, “Grace and Innocence,” 34.

<sup>33</sup> Published over a decade later than its “predecessor.” Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny,” 1919, trans. and ed. J. Strachey, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 17 (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 219–252. For an interesting unpicking of the text, see Cixous, “Fiction and its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud’s *Das Unheimlich*,” *New Literary History* 7, 3 (1973): 525–48.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 226, 244.

<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately, the success of Freud’s essay has led to a great deal of misinterpretation and misuse of the term, most of which is more akin to Jentsch’s uncanny than to Freud’s (i.e. the confusion between animate/inanimate, rather than familiar/unfamiliar). Like Terry Castle in her *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), Victoria Nelson’s *The Secret Life of Puppets* views the uncanny (in Freud’s sense of the repressed which turns frightful) as a product of the Enlightenment’s suppression of belief in favour of rationalism (cf. chapters 2 and 4), and Freud in fact makes repeated reference to the late eighteenth-century philosopher Schelling to clarify his term. Nelson goes on to study how what were once objects of faith (puppet-idol) have been demonised into the grotesque in popular culture.

<sup>36</sup> Ernest Jentsch, “On the Psychology of The Uncanny,” trans. R. Sellars, *Angelaki* 2,1 (1995): 7–16, 10. First published as “Zur Psychologie des Unheimlich,” *Psychiatrisch-Neurologische Wochenschrift* 8, 22–23 (1906): 195–98, 203–05. This is the first and only (way overdue) English translation, which nonetheless has been taken for granted as obsolete and redundant in relation to the Freud essay.



But what instigates this doubt, what is the actual aesthetic experience? Again, it would appear to be through the rhythm of movement that the animate exposes itself as inanimate, and vice versa. In his example of a tree that suddenly moves, showing itself to be a giant snake, he writes that the mass that at first seemed lifeless suddenly reveals “an inherent energy because of its movement,” which might eventually show its origin to be an organic body through “its methodical quality”<sup>37</sup> and thus dispel doubt. Likewise, a person experiencing the view of a locomotion or steamboat for the first time will find “the enigmatic autonomous movement and the regular noises of the machine” similar to the sounds of “human breath.”<sup>38</sup> In these illustrations the objects appear to come alive in their kinetic rhythms, recalling the throbs of living flesh. The sounds are “methodical” and “regular,” simulating life, though not quite. Jentsch’s most intriguing example refers to the human body that shakes and quavers like a machine. Lay people, he writes, are generally affected by the sight of the articulations of mental and nervous illness, which disrupts the relative physical harmony that tends to characterise normal bodies. When this disruption occurs,

and if the situation does not seem trivial or *comic*, the consequence of an unimportant incident, or if it is not quite familiar (like alcoholic intoxication, for example), then the dark knowledge dawns on the unschooled observer that *mechanical* processes are taking place... the epileptic attack of spasms reveals the human body to the viewer – the body that under normal conditions is so meaningful, expedient, and unitary, functioning according to the directions of his consciousness – *as an immensely complicated and delicate mechanism*.<sup>39</sup>

Recognising in line with Bergson that such an effect can easily cause laughter, not unease, the body can however slip into an area of uncertainty whereby it appears to be manipulated by a source external to and greater than itself. This epileptic movement recalls the puppet Kleist describes as “shaken in a purely haphazard way,” falling “into a kind of rhythmic movement which resembles dance.” Strings seem to dominate its movements, and the body is no longer “unitary” but split into two bodies, the one absorbed by the other, acting against and despite the “directions of his consciousness.” It is an overstatement to say that this unconscious dancer complies with Kleist’s ideal choreography, but it is nonetheless an interesting comparison. The body tenses, hardens into spasms and is rearranged according to a different set of movements, of rhythms. Although the epileptic body is apparently one, it confesses some other presence inhabiting it, manoeuvring it, according to the long-established accusation of possession. The affinity of the movements of an epileptic and those of a puppet can be traced back to the etymology of the Greek term for marionette, *neurospasma*, meaning violent and involuntary

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

nerve contraction or convulsion.<sup>40</sup> The strings are envisioned as the raw externalisation of nerves trifled with by some greater force. Indeed, close observation will reveal that the marionette is brisk and precise in resisting weight upwards, yet any movement downwards cannot exceed the speed of the pull of gravity. One might say that descent conforms to the rhythm of collapse, whereas ascent to that of contraction. And as the marionette (as opposed to the rod or glove puppet) is a figure in which the pulls upwards must be to some degree more forceful than the pull downwards, it is in fact first and foremost a creature of contractions, which are then followed by collapses. In the human body these two-way dynamics seem to tear it in two, fracture it into a pattern of more than one being. The word 'convulsion' comes from *con-vellere*, to tear apart, to pull in all directions, yet the prefix 'con' works to add the sense of pulling together. Convulsion is a "held-together-coming-apart."<sup>41</sup> It is a movement quality that emphasises the 'sinewed' jointed-ness of an articulated body, which is perhaps why in his text on the marionette Kleist alternates the term with that of *Gliedermann*, jointed-man. The hard shapes, limbs, bones, are configured into one body, articulated through their deflexion away from one another. The intersections of lines create angles, evoking unity and segmentation, oneness and multiplicity.

The body reveals two coexistent rhythms in its pendulous or contracted forms of movement. Nowhere is this more apparent than in dance. This might explain the fascination exerted over choreographers and composers alike with the theme of the live dancer emulating a puppet, doll or automaton. The movement qualities of the inanimate are interiorised, as for example in the ballet of *Coppelia*, which fluctuates between Bergson's notion of the comic and Jentsch's idea of the uncanny, as well as touching to some extent on Kleist's notion of grace. It is Jentsch who first suggests E. T. A Hoffman's *The Sandman* (written in 1817) as an example of the literary uncanny, leaving the reader in uncertainty whether the figure is a human being or an automaton.<sup>42</sup> Freud analyses this story in depth from the perspective of the castration complex, but I would like to draw attention back to Jentsch's emphasis, which is more aligned with the story's choreographic success in its reworking as *Coppelia*, first staged at the Paris Opera on the 25 May 1870 under the choreography of Arthur Saint-Léon, and endlessly popular to the present day.<sup>43</sup> This is the one of the earliest examples of a modern reversal whereby the *performer appears as automaton*, rather than the automaton as performer, as we saw in the previous chapter. Already in Hoffmann's tale, Olympia, an automaton, is the

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 14. My italics. He distinguishes this from the effect created by the sight of hysterical people, as in those cases consciousness still remains visible. For the expert such a view will not appear uncanny, for he is familiar with such sights and therefore does not experience uncertainty and doubt.

<sup>40</sup> Maurizio Bettini, *Il Ritratto dell'Amante*, 249.

<sup>41</sup> Steven Connor, "The Shakes."

<sup>42</sup> Jentsch, 13.

<sup>43</sup> Offenbach's opera *The Tales of Hoffmann* also included a reworking of "The Sandman," and was performed in 1881 alternating a live performer and an inanimate doll. The finale is far more gruesome than the earlier *Coppelia*,

'performing' object of Nathanael's obsession and eventual decline into madness. His incapacity to perceive her mechanization is subtly communicated to the reader through the descriptions of her movements at a ball: despite there being "something stiff and measured about her walk and bearing," Nathanael is drawn to dance with her. Whirling her about, Nathanael "had thought that he usually followed the beat of the music well, but from the peculiar rhythmical evenness with which she danced and which often confused him, he was aware of how faulty his own sense of time really was."<sup>44</sup> Indeed, as an aftermath of Nathanael's final suicide, "a horrible distrust of human figures rose in general," and many men asked their mistresses to sing and dance "unrhythmically,"<sup>45</sup> to prove their non-automation. Olympia and Nathanael's dance sequence is clearly the inspiration for the ballet.<sup>46</sup> Unlike the choreography of *Pygmalion* (chapter 3), which simply describes a metamorphosis from inanimate to animate fluidity, here the inanimate lingers in the body, haunts its every move. The original story is tailored to maximise the difference between the inanimate automaton doll and the live dancer, renamed Coppelia and Swanilda. From the start Coppelia is an *impersonation* of mechanical movement, not just in the ballet but also in the storyline (it is Swanilda fooling Nathanael into longing for her). This kinetic story must express itself through the non-verbal narrative of movement quality, and therefore Coppelia is conveyed through rigidity, immobility, heaviness, whereas Swanilda must symbolise the perfect ballerina by being the graceful embodiment of agility, mobility, and lightness. Swanilda excels in rapid, technically difficult steps (articulated pointework, and multiple entrechats), which shimmer with butterfly-like mobility. When she takes the mechanical doll's place and pretends to come to life, she moves with staccato arm movements, shrugs, raised legs, blinking eyes. The differing body patterns exist in the one and same ballerina, trained to show both her human mastery of fluid grace as well as her skill in expressing vacant 'anti-grace' and automaton-like abruptness. As a contemporary critic wrote, the ballet presents "a jumble of dummies in rigid poses, their angular gestures making awkward attempts at imitating real life but managing only to produce a *frightening* and *laughable* sort of tableau of the dead... gesticulating in a strange fashion with a whirr of cogs, pulleys and

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as, recalling the scapegoat function of the image, it ends with Olympia's violent dismemberment. For the influence of this scene on Bellmer's dolls, see Sue Taylor, *Hans Bellmer, "Uncanny Automata"* 56-68.

<sup>44</sup> E.T.A. Hoffmann, "The Sandman," 1817, *Tales*, ed. V. Lange, trans. L. J. Kent, and E.C. Knight (New York: Continuum, 1982), 277-308, 299-300. At the same time, Nathanael seems to animate her through touching or looking at her: "at that moment the pulse seemed to beat again in her cold hand..."

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 305-6.

<sup>46</sup> Although the story is considerably altered, Hoffman's description of her movements serves as preface to the Ballet programme. *Coppelia, ou la Fille aux Yeux d'Émail: Ballet en deux actes et trios tableaux de Charles Nuiittier et A. Saint-Leon* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1870), 14. Cf. Mia Lombardi, "Coppelia, la Fanciulla dagli Occhi di Smalto – Storia di un Automa in Danza," *Pinocchio fra i Burattini*, ed. F. Tempesti (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1993), 161-177; on gender in Coppelia, see Gwen Bergner and Nicole Plett, "Uncanny Women and Anxious Masters: Reading *Coppelia* against Freud," *Moving Words: Re-writing Dance*, ed. G. Morris (London: Routledge, 1996), 159-179; cf. Jane Goodall, "Transferred Agencies: Performance and the Fear of Automatism," *Theatre Journal* 49 (1997): 441-53.

counterweights...<sup>47</sup> The movements of the inanimate incarnate evoke both the uncanny and the comic.

Ballet in particular is by design staged-performativity, artificial, repetitive and anti-natural, which is perhaps why it engages so willingly with the figures populating *Coppelia*, *The Nutcracker* (first staged in St. Petersburg 1892), and *Petrouchka* (first staged in Paris 1911),<sup>48</sup> to name just a few. This modernist mechanical dance aesthetic is one which Norman Bryson defines as characterised by the hammering rhythms of the first machine age: "fragmentation (in bursts, spasms, jerks, pulses); repetition (the first precise repetitions, since the body repeats only approximately); and velocity (the trio of trains, cars, planes)."<sup>49</sup> After the industrial revolution labour is no longer unified by the maker's body, and is broken into discontinuous fragments of engineered motion. In these conditions of modernity, the figure is only a synecdoche, a fetishized part for the whole, and the body is rethought as an assemblage of parts.<sup>50</sup> Staccato movements correspond to the notion of a non-unified whole, a body which reveals its inherent fragmentation. Moreover, modernism's tendency to blur the boundaries between "high" and "low" (or popular) art and culture finds inspiration in the fairground and the figure of the puppet,<sup>51</sup> which, as we have seen above, very physically renders this fragmented reassembled body. Ballet feeds off the tension between animate and inanimate movements, pitting one choreographic style *against* the other, side by side. As Isadora Duncan would write, ballet focuses on the spring of movement being "in the centre of the back at the base of the spine. From this axis, says the ballet master, arms, legs and trunk must move freely, giving the result of an articulated puppet."<sup>52</sup> The puppet-like quality of ballet recalls those mechanical jewellery boxes with pirouetting ballet dancers that twirl when opened, emblems of 'feminine' grace that are in truth stuck in taut deadlock. The ethereal image of the female ballet dancer aspires to "skim the ground like elves," to paraphrase Kleist, through the anti-gravitational, barely-resting-on-the-ground pointed toe effect. This same tiptoe technique can be used to opposite effect in automaton sequences, where the mechanical is equated with jerky, repetitious un-resilience, and the entire leg hardens from the hip to the toe, ridding itself of gracile articulation (also achieved by placing the foot solidly flat on the floor).

<sup>47</sup> Théophile Gautier, "Opéra, *Coppélia*," *Le Journal Officiel de l'Empire Français*, May 30<sup>th</sup> 1870. *Gautier on Dance*, trans. I. Guest (London: Dance Books, 1986), 333. My italics.

<sup>48</sup> Interestingly Susan Leigh Foster reads *Petrouchka* not as a stiff marionette-like figure but rather as a limp pathetic non-ballet figure, prefiguring the non-geometrized anti-ballet torque of turn of the century dancers such as Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, etc. *Choreography and Narrative: Ballet's Staging of Story and Desire* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 261.

<sup>49</sup> Norman Bryson, "Cultural Studies and Dance History," *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*, ed. J.C. Desmond (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 55-77. Bryson uses Nijinsky as an example of the tensions between the two emergent aesthetics: in *Petrouschka* the movements are more puppet-like, whereas in the *Rites of Spring* the mechanization is more aggressively modernist.

<sup>50</sup> On this effect in the visual arts see Nochlin, *The Body in Pieces*.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Shershow, 187, who claims that appropriation of popular culture is central to the modernist theatrical project.

<sup>52</sup> Isadora Duncan, *My Life*, 1927 (New York: Liveright, 1995), 58. Cf. chapter 7.

Coppelia's mechanical legs are somewhat reminiscent of two peg-legs upon which the dancer must balance herself, hinge on the floor rather than skim it. The entire body expresses this hardening, but perhaps it becomes most visible in the contact between *foot* and *floor*, the very point where animate and inanimate respond to each other as ricochet or jolt. Like the legs of the puppet or the prosthetic leg, the movement lapses between a 'leaning' which enables propulsion (forwards) and a 'leaning' which becomes incorporation into the pedestal (backwards). In the previous chapter we concluded with the invisibility of the animating hand engaged in showing. This chapter instead concludes with the balletic foot's "disappearing act,"<sup>53</sup> reappearing when it hardens, weighs, and limps in mechanical imitation.




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<sup>53</sup> Peter Stallybrass, "Footnotes," *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, eds. D. Hillman and C. Mazzio (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 313-325, 313.

## 6

*Puppet-envy and Armour*  
*The Actor Must Die*

“...living people pretending to be those wooden images of life which pretend to be living people”

A brightly dressed princess emerges on stage, dancing like one of Artaud's Balinese hieroglyphs, her headdress shimmering, her face expressionless. She seems doll-like, but controlled within her own body. Out come several black-hooded men, eyes covered like multiple impersonations of Death or Bunraku operators. One hooded figure grabs hold of her right leg, rooting it solidly to the ground. Suddenly the rest of her body is flailing loosely around her, as if unbound. Her remaining leg and both her arms seem to be drawn apart and above, in desperate opposition to the fixity of that one trapped leg. Another dark figure seizes the left leg, anchoring her to the ground. The arms continue to move about exaggeratedly, as if the strings were still loose. More hooded men gradually attach themselves to her body, her arms, head, waist, pinning her down like a butterfly. Covered in manipulating hands, her bodily movements change abruptly, becoming submissive, entranced, compliant though lacking in volition. Two narrators tell her tale from the corner of the stage, making the sounds of her body, speaking of her for her. She is at the service of a narrative of loss and flight. Still expressionless, the princess is made to sob through a series of external gestures: mouth opened, hands covering her face, head facing the heavens in despair. She is limply laid down on her stomach, one leg folded to leave a hollow in the area of her torso. A simple nudge of her hip echoes throughout, making her entire body appear lost in convulsive weeping. The repetitive prodding is shocking in its minuteness, expanding throughout the rest of her limbs with no further touching. It jolts in its sexuality, bordering on rape. Some of the audience laugh at the puppet-like effect. The story continues, her limbs are opened and closed mid-air, wing-like, by her operators. Her captive body simulates the freedom of flight, she flies away.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Symons, *Studies in the Seven Arts* (London: Constable, 1906), 374.

<sup>2</sup> Based on a short scene from the Israeli dance company Batsheva's *Sabotage Baby*, performed at the Barbican Centre, London, in October 2001.

How can a living actor become puppet-like? Subjection, obedience, limplimbedness, mechanical movements, clumsiness? How can one rid the stage, shake loose, as it were, of the puppeteer? How can one body possess another body, without strings, without touching, without entering, without subsuming the other body? Can one split into both puppet and puppeteer? Where is the site of entrance for a manipulator, a movement originator (intrinsic or extrinsic)? Does one have to glaze into absence, die into pliable incorruption, like the relics and incorrupt cadavers referred to above? When becoming the inanimate incarnate, what status to belief (that of the performer as much as of the audience)?

According to John Cohen, there are at least three things that automata (and, by extension, puppets) are as yet incapable of: laughter (or tears); blushing; or committing suicide.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps because of this inherent resistance to hyperventilated realism, to embarrassed or melodramatic psychology, the puppet resurfaced from 'below' in the early twentieth century to overthrow the human actor. Everything that in the actor comes supposedly from *within* (voice/words, gesture/impulse toward movement/intention), in the puppet is *extrinsic*. Rather than the actor truly becoming his role, or the suspicious disbelief of the alienated actor (although alienation is not entirely irrelevant<sup>4</sup>), communication takes place through choreography, movements translate into meaning. For, although the puppet is an analogue of man, *it cannot impersonate*.<sup>5</sup> It can only convey a de-humanised, de-psychologized actor; it sublimates gestures, de-vocalises speech, and these limits are its potency. It undoes the disgust with all-too-human mannerisms by presenting an incarnation of the human that is a step removed from itself. The puppet (and puppet-actor) can offer absence through presence, removing as it were the excessively visible human 'original' by becoming possessed by another secondary, 'intercessionary' detached body (a quick-change fundamental to theatre). If in the earlier chapters the notion of presence in the inanimate was substantiated or disbelieved, now instead, as we shall soon see, absence in the animate is proposed, a form of acting that evokes the dead and the distant non-present. Might returning to a re-animation of the inanimate, or a de-animation of the animate, displace the Enlightenment's attempt to de-miraculate objects, without 'lapsing' as it were into susceptible belief in the miraculous? In his "Apology for Puppets" from 1903, Arthur Symons would write of sitting close enough to the puppet stage to afford the satisfying complication "of seeing the wires at work,"<sup>6</sup> thus pointing not to illusion, nor to disillusion, but rather to an appreciation of the double-vision materially inherent to

<sup>3</sup> John Cohen, *Human Robots in Myth and Science*, 137. In other words, Kleistian consciousness.

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Brecht wrote several aphorisms on the gestural actor and on choreography as a suitable medium for producing the alienation effect. That said, his idea that the actor be seen to "observe" his own gestures, in other words the actor's own social critical stance to his character (an awareness which must spread through the audience), differentiates his theories from the idea of the puppet-actor who lacks such consciousness.

<sup>5</sup> Luigi Allegri claims the puppet epitomizes the search for an 'alternative' non-empathetic theatre as exemplified by Artaud, Marinetti, Brecht, Craig, Meyerhold, Schlemmer (of which more below). *Per una Storia del Teatro come Spettacolo: Teatro di Burattini e di Marionette* (Parma: Università di Parma, 1978).

<sup>6</sup> Symons, "An Apology for Puppets," *Plays, Acting and Music* (London: Duckworth, 1903): 193-6, 194.

viewing the animate-inanimate puppet. Craig too (of whom more shortly) was equally as enthusiastic about Japanese Bunraku puppets as he was about the visible puppeteer's mask-like self-effacement.<sup>7</sup> When the puppetry is a double-act, one body manipulating another, the response is an outcry of deception or the conversion to belief. Only tableaux vivants, incorrupt cadavers or fused prosthetic limbs present one single compact, complicit body. They are outdone by the puppet-like actor, who collapses both puppet and puppeteer in *becoming* the articulated animated de-animated object, bodying forth on stage what is otherwise and elsewhere disbelieved.



In Kleist's "On the Marionette Theatre," the dancer goes so far as to assert that "if he could get somebody to make a marionette to his specifications he would perform such dances with it as neither he nor any other trained dancer of the day." In accordance with Kleist's dead pendulous limbs of the puppet, our princess is to some extent extinguished, enchanted into becoming a puppet that can then be reanimated by her operators. In 1810, Kleist touched for the first time on the desire for the death of the performer, a curious, often misinterpreted assertion that would be repeated in the century that followed.

In chapter 1 I referred to the medieval expectation of empathy through *imitatio Christi*, pious men and women histrionically emulating the incarnate Christ. In an age of predominantly Protestant secularisation (undoubtedly prompted by such overtly incarnational aesthetics, as Protestant censures illustrate at length), when man imitates man, having 'lost' the divine prototype, certain discontents are bound to arise. Modernism's general tendency toward aesthetic abstraction, partly under the influence of oriental art and theatre and the rediscovery of the so-called 'primitive' art forms in museums, was clearly paving the way for non-empathetic<sup>8</sup> forms of expression. Similarly, the industrialised reification, commodification and objectification of the human body reconfigured the relation of 'persons' and 'things' into an alienated depersonalisation<sup>9</sup> (although some technophiliacs would relish, not regret, man's being subsumed into machine). Indeed, for a combination of reasons, modernity seemed to herald the birth of the puppet-actor.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Edward Gordon Craig, under pseudonym (if as such it may be termed) of a Japanese, "Puppets in Japan," *The Mask* 6, 3 (January 1914): 217-220. Cf. Olga Taxidou, *The Mask: A Periodical Performance by Edward Gordon Craig* (Newark: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998), 79-109. Also Roland Barthes on Bunraku in *Empire of Signs*, trans. R. Howard (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), 48-62.

<sup>8</sup> This preference for abstraction (the attraction to "life-denying" unchanging inorganic forms) over affective empathy (organic self-projection into an object or form) was articulated in 1908 (the same year as Craig's essay, cf. below) in relation to the visual arts in Wilhelm Worringer's *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style*, trans. M. Bullock (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953).

<sup>9</sup> As theorised by Karl Marx in his *Das Kapital*, first published in 1867.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Harold B. Segel, *Pinocchio's Progeny: Puppets, Marionettes, Automatons and Robots in Modernist and Avant-Garde Drama*; Robert S. Peterson, "The Perception of 'Puppetness' in Legacy of Modernism," *The Puppetry*



In theatre, the realistic overemphasis of subjectivity and confessional narratives, and the growing cult of actors and their invasive personalities, led to the idea of an un-affected, non-mimetic, de-personalised actor, which had begun to engage Western theatre practitioners from as early as the 1890s. Maurice Maeterlinck heralded a symbolist theatre in which actors were artificially formalized through extended pauses and slow gestural movement interspersed with stillness, proposing an estranged marionette-like presence which has “the appearance of life yet without being alive.”<sup>11</sup> Alfred Jarry, in antithesis, premiered his frenetic *Ubu Roi* in 1896 with monotone jerky players that were, according to an appalled W. B. Yeats, “supposed to be dolls, toys, marionettes... all hopping like wooden frogs...”<sup>12</sup> This puppet-envy (Maeterlinck, for its hieratic, metaphysical potential; Jarry for its burlesque qualities) finds its true heir with the theatre-director, etcher, writer and innovative set-designer, Edward Gordon Craig (1872-1966), who throughout his career wrote extensively on puppets and puppet-like acting. Born into Victorian culture, Craig soon exiled himself to Europe, thus placing himself within the context of the European *avant-garde* and distancing himself from the British modernist experiments in poetic drama conducted by Eliot, Yeats and later Auden and Isherwood. Craig wanted to liberate theatre from its parasitic relation to the written text, and looked to the silent puppet for inspiration. In his 1907 article “The Actor and the Über-marionette,” he famously stated: “The actor must go, and in his place comes the inanimate figure – the Über-marionette we may call him, until he has won for himself a better name.”<sup>13</sup>

How serious he was in his intention of physically replacing the actor with the wooden counterpart often reads as deliberately unclear. In the preface to the 1925 edition of *On the Art of Theatre*, Craig refers to his controversial essay by withdrawing the literalness of the text, explaining, perhaps with some afterthought:

I no more want to see the living actors replaced by things of wood than the great Italian actress of our day wants all the actors to die.... “And what, pray, is this monster the Über-marionette”

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*Yearbook*, vol. 2, ed. J. Fisher (Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), 1-20; W.B. Worthen, “Of Actors and Automata: Hieroglyphs of Modernism,” *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 9 (1994): 3-19.

<sup>11</sup> Cited in Patrick McGuinness, *Maurice Maeterlinck and the Making of Modern Theatre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 110.

<sup>12</sup> Cited in Annabelle Melzer, *Latest Rage and Big Drum: Dada and Surrealist Performance* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1980), 118. Yeats indeed preferred the solemnity of his friend and eventual collaborator Craig. Cf. James W. Flannery, “W.B. Yeats, Gordon Craig and the Visual Arts of the Theatre,” *Yeats and the Theatre*, eds. R. O’Driscoll and L. Reynolds (London: Macmillan, 1975): 82-108; Karen Dorn, “Dialogue into Movement: W. B. Yeats’s Theatre Collaboration with Gordon Craig,” *Ibid.*, 109-36; on Maeterlinck, Jarry, Craig, and Yeats see S. Beynon John, “Actor as Puppet: Variations on a Nineteenth Century Theatrical Idea,” *Bernhardt and the Theatre of her Time*, ed. E. Salmon (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1977): 243-68.

<sup>13</sup> Craig, “The Actor and the Über-marionette,” repr. in *On the Art of Theatre* (London: The Seven Arts Book Club, 1958): 54-94, 81. The essay first appeared in *The Mask* 1, 2 (April 1908): 3-15, a theatre journal Craig himself set up in Florence and ran between 1908-29, filling it almost entirely with his own contributions that he wrote under 60-70 or so pseudonyms. To a degree, *The Mask* became the stage for Craig’s tendentially unrealisable theories. Cf. Taxidou. Craig’s inspiration for the term derives from Nietzsche’s Übermensch.

cry a few terrified ones. The Über-marionette is the actor plus fire, minus egoism; the fire of the gods and demons, without the smoke and steam of mortality. The literal ones took me to mean pieces of wood one foot in height; that infuriated them; they talked of it for ten years as a mad, a wrong, an insulting idea. The point was gained by them, and I think I owe them here a word of thanks.<sup>14</sup>

The great Italian actress he refers to is Eleonora Duse, whom he quotes in an epigram saying "To save the Theatre, the Theatre must be destroyed, the actors and actresses must all die of the plague. They poison the air, they make art impossible."<sup>15</sup> In 1907, Craig's ideas were still in embryonic form, and the idea of replacing the live actor was not as ridiculous as he later insisted. His attempt to proclaim a new form of anti-realist acting consisting of symbolical gestures, greatly inspired by Maeterlinck, was here overstated and for this reason remained somewhat vague, far more evocative than intelligible. Elsewhere he wrote that his rejection of actors was a provisional expedient, "until a breed can be grown which are like the rest of my thought, *hard, clearcut, passionless*."<sup>16</sup> But the birth of the new über-marionette actor never truly took place, remaining an essentially unrealised ideal. Craig spent much of his life writing and theorising about the theatre rather than producing plays, his own concepts often tying him into knots of inactivity. In the absence of such actors Craig did in fact experiment with eight-foot-high articulated wooden figures, planned productions of marionette plays and wrote several himself (in addition to being a fervent marionette collector). In 1914, he conceded: "If the Western actor can become what I am told the Eastern [Indian] actor was and is, I withdraw all that I have written in my essay 'The Actor and the Über-marionette,'"<sup>17</sup> and later still, in 1930, he declared the actor Henry Irving, his godfather and mentor, the shadow of "a coming event," the prototype of the über-marionette.<sup>18</sup> Either way, whether he wanted the live actor replaced or simply improved, the marionette obviously possessed charms that the human performer did not, and to which he should aspire. Regardless of these post-scriptural apologies and speculations (which he possibly only formulated after many technical frustrations and in response to heated criticisms of the original essay), in Craig's mind the inanimate figure was still far superior to the animate figure.

According to Craig, man's natural tendency towards freedom makes him utterly useless material for the art of theatre. Theatrical adequacy would appear to depend on the pliability

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, ix-x.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>16</sup> Letter to Martin Shaw from February 15th 1906, cited in Christopher Innes, *Edward Gordon Craig* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 126. In many ways the acting quality Craig wanted anticipated the theories of Brecht, and in *The Mask* 15, 2 (April-June 1929) he mentions his approval of *The Threepenny Opera*. Somewhat surprisingly, considering his anti-naturalistic tendencies, Craig's major theatrical production was a (difficult) collaboration with Stanislavski: "Moscow Hamlet," for the Moscow art Theatre in 1912.

<sup>17</sup> Craig, "A plea for two theatres," *The Mask* 8 (August 1918): 15-31, 19. The techniques of the Indian actor were suggested to him by Dr. Coomaraswamy, who contributed to the *Mask* on several occasions.

of the material on stage, the subjection of the conduit to the autocratic maker or director. What makes the actor a "free" spirit is, paradoxically, that he is slave to his emotions. At the mercy of his feelings, what he exposes on stage is no art, but a series of accidental and vulnerable confessions. His passions dictate his sense of movement, displace his centre of gravity, moving his limbs "as one in a frantic dream or as one distraught, swaying here and there; his head, his arms, his feet, if not utterly beyond control, are so weak to stand against the torrent of his passions, that they are ready to play him false at any moment."<sup>19</sup> Emotion drenches the actor's body, renders it limp to the point of collapse. This weakness has an anti-theatrical obstinacy, for the actor will never succumb entirely to the will of another, he will forever "revolt against being made a slave or medium for expression of another's thoughts,"<sup>20</sup> against being made an *instrument*. To thought he is a rebel, yet to his own sensitivity he is puppet. There has never, Craig declares pessimistically, been an actor so trained from head to foot that he would answer only to the working of his mind without permitting emotions ever so much as to awaken; an actor who achieved such a degree of mechanical perfection that his body was absolutely slave to his mind.<sup>21</sup> The ideal actor should be equivalent to the sculptor or painter in that he has total mastery over his malleable material: if only the actor could make his body into a "machine, or into a dead piece of material such as clay," that could obey him "in every movement for the entire space of time it was before an audience," the work of art would be made of the actor who had dreamt, executed, and repeated this execution without the slightest variation.<sup>22</sup> *If only one could die and manipulate one's own corpse* (again and again, mathematically).

Mark Franko interprets Craig's notion of the über-marionette in terms of an obsession with perfection as repeatability without the variations of the live actor, i.e. performance as an object or artefact that can be replicated to an equal degree of persuasive effect.<sup>23</sup> Craig's desire is clearly parallel to certain technological developments such as the phonograph (1878) and early cinema (1896),<sup>24</sup> which were thought to replicate performance without modification, repeatedly. However, his focus remained live performance and the bodily or sculptural actor.

<sup>18</sup> Craig, *Henry Irving* (London: J. M. Dent, 1930), 40.

<sup>19</sup> Craig, "The actor and the Über-marionette," 56. Whereas in Kleist it is consciousness and knowledge that displace man's centre of gravity and causes his loss of grace, his affectation, in Craig it is the passions of emotion.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 70. The sculptural comparison is featured throughout Craig's thinking, and in his *Übermarions* notebooks (1905-6) he writes of his search for a pliable material "which takes the impression of the artist but does not change after the impression is given," offering an everlasting "solidity" similar to the materials used by the painter, the sculptor, or the architect. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Gordon Craig collection, 17, cited in Irene Eynat-Confino, *Beyond the Mask: Gordon Craig, Movement, and the Actor* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 89.

<sup>23</sup> Mark Franko, *Dance as Text: Ideologies of the Baroque Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 140-152. He views Craig's ideas in relation to Diderot, Kleist and Schlemmer.

<sup>24</sup> Although of course early silent film included the live performance of the musical accompaniment, so that it was not entirely technologically reproduced and performances would have probably varied. Cf. Miriam Hansen *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991), 43.

The prevailing conventions of technologically reproduced performance were not conducive to a depersonalised mode of acting, but precisely the opposite, as if to over-compensate for the implied loss of presence.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps the very reproducibility of reality through new technologies forced theatre to reconsider what it presented on stage...

Indeed, Craig's passionless performer must look towards the puppet, aspire to the impervious immunity of the insentient object. No more confessions of gush, emotion, swaggering personality, "not one single breath of it,"<sup>26</sup> the new actor must as it were withhold the sounds of inhalation and exhalation, quieten the rhythms of pulsation, rid himself of all the tremors of living flesh, those perceptible weaknesses and excesses of the human body. This actor must harden into a state of hypnotic trance. At the crux of his argument, Craig writes:

no longer content with a puppet, we must create an über-marionette. The über-marionette will not compete with life – rather it will go beyond it. Its ideal will not be the flesh and blood but rather the body in trance – it will aim to clothe itself with a death-like beauty while exhaling a living spirit.<sup>27</sup>

The mystified notion of a body that clothes itself with death-like beauty whilst exhaling living spirit brings to mind the ever-growing interest in spiritualism,<sup>28</sup> evoking the image of a human vessel, enabling another presence to appear through or within it. One is reminded of Kempelen's Chess-playing automaton, a hardened armour with its possible homunculus crouched within. Death is an exterior, skin-like surface, whilst life exudes from within. Somewhat like the statuary relic, the actor must become exoskeletal, reverse his flesh-covered bone into bone-covered flesh.

Again, as in Kleist, the distinction between the animate and the inanimate, rather than being purely a question of agency, becomes more prominently one of *rhythm*. The serene rhythm of death features at length throughout Craig's essay as something to aspire to, whereas life appears

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<sup>25</sup> Beyond the actual technological medium, the style of acting that characterised early silent film was highly reliant on the theatrical genre of melodrama (as was the narrative structure, especially in American silent film around 1907-8). From about 1912 cinema-acting aimed to restrain pantomimic acting style and replace broad physical gestures with emphasized facial expressions, and to render characters as psychologically motivated individuals as opposed to moral or comic types (this coincided with the closer framing and facial acting). According to contemporary critics, the pantomimic style was viewed as the 'old' European style, whereas the newer mode was labelled American. Cinema was increasingly aiming to render its own medium invisible, to deflect any awareness of the camera so as to prioritise a sense of voyeuristic naturalism (even today method-acting, based on Stanislavski, seems to prevail.) Craig, however, sought a bodily mode of acting that was neither overly pantomimic (in spite of his appreciation of *commedia dell'arte*) nor realistic ("confessional," as he would have it), but trance-like and symbolic. On early film acting styles, see David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristhin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge, 1988), 189-92.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 87. Cf. William E. Gruber's study of Craig's suppression of characterisation in his chapter "Gordon Craig's Depersonalised Stage," *Missing Persons: Character and Characterization in Modern Drama* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 13-47.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 84-5.

as frantic, accelerated, panic-stricken and excessive. The descriptive metaphors are somewhat erratic, particularly those that associate the über-marionette with a particular body temperature. If in his 1925 preface Craig refers to the über-marionette as the actor plus fire, minus smoke and steam, in the earlier article the metaphors reveal a different blood heat. Craig aims to catch some far-off glimpse of that spirit which we call Death, to which he then adds: "they say they are cold, these dead things, I do not know – they often seem warmer and more living than that which parades as life..."<sup>29</sup> The heat of the living must be tempered and decreased to the tepidness of the marionette. Equally, the body must remain stable in its pulsations. Puppets, reliable in their inanimatedness, remain indifferent to applause, "their hearts beat no faster, no slower, their signals do not grow hurried or confused,"<sup>30</sup> their faces stay solemn and remote. It is the decelerated distance and *froidure* of the marionette to which the actor must aspire, rather than skin-tight presence.

To return to the image of the Chess-player, there must be a surplus gap – in other words, detachment, breathing space, leg-room – an area that distinguishes the body of the actor from that of his surface. Craig advocated the use of masks as a means towards de-personalisation and distancing, and there are hypotheses that already in 1909 he considered the possibility of a body mask, as it were, a life-size puppet containing its operator within.<sup>31</sup> This fits with his proposition that the actor should get "out of the skin of the part,"<sup>32</sup> rather than erupt from under the skin. "Out" may mean estranged, removed (externally, the operator from his theatrical object), or distanced, mask-like, almost shrunk a step back (internally), as in the case of the Chess-player or the idol Tervegan, whose hypothetical operator was smaller and detached from its container. In the previous chapters, the image appeared more lifelike in its capacity to mimic death; now, in the movement towards non-lifelikeness, the so-called über-marionette should *appear more dead in its capacity to mimic life*.

But it is not the inanimate as still object that Craig yearns for. Tableaux vivants are never mentioned. It is the inanimate as a kinetic, performing object, somewhere between stillness and live movement, with an intermediary rhythm belonging to neither. Indeed, total stillness amounted to sterile mimicry, death as death, rather than death exhaling "living spirit." Essentially Craig was waging a war against stage realism and acting as impersonation. For him, life imitating life was lifeless. Throughout his writings, mimesis is used to convey his disdain as well as his hopes for the art of theatre. Like his precursor Kleist, his attraction to the

<sup>28</sup> Craig's interest in symbolists such as Maeterlinck aligned him with an interest in the occult, and at the time he wrote this text the verity of spiritualism was highly debated. Cf. chapter 5, 11-7.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>31</sup> Theodore Herstand, "Actor-Über-Marionette," *Theatre Notebook* 20,4 (1966): 151-155, 152.

<sup>32</sup> Craig, "The actor and the Über-Marionette." 63. This notion of dis-identified acting presents a parallel with Brechtian notions of alienation. See above.

inanimate expresses itself through a series of plays on and reversals of the mimetic tradition. For Kleist, sculpture and painting, those traps into the realms of stillness, became in turn models for emulation. In Craig's era, the expansion of the art of photography epitomised these mimetic functions, and is employed here by Craig in a derogatory sense.

The actor looks on life as a photo-machine looks upon life; and he attempts to make a picture to rival the photograph... the best he can do when he wants to catch and convey the poetry of a kiss, the heat of a fight, or the calm of death, is to copy slavishly, photographically – he kisses – he fights – he lies back and mimics death... Is it not a poor art and a poor cleverness, which cannot convey the spirit and essence of an idea to an audience, but can only show an artless copy, a facsimile of the thing itself? This is to be an imitator, not an artist. This is to claim kinship with the ventriloquist...

"What, then," cries the red-blooded and flashing actor, "is there to be no flesh and blood in this same art of the theatre of yours? No life?" It depends what you call life, signor, when you use the word in relation with the idea of art. The painter means something rather different to actuality when he speaks of life in his art... it is only the actor, the ventriloquist, or the animal-stuffer who, when speaking of putting life into their work, mean some actual and lifelike reproduction, something blatant in its appeal...<sup>33</sup>

A series of equations are set up: acting, photography, ventriloquism, taxidermy. Photography and taxidermy run parallel as art forms that capture life into stillness. Acting and ventriloquism seem more relevant to the notion of voice displacement and lack of agency, or rather, the speaking of the words of another. All of these have a certain kinship to life, in that they reproduce it mechanically, without invention. This form of mimicry implies a more blatant, empty and motionless death than the mystified death-like trance he claims for the über-marionette. Perhaps what the marionette implies, unlike the photograph and the stuffed-animal, is a sense of articulated entranced movement. Indeed, Craig would herald a theatre of movement and gesture, of choreography and rhythm. For him the tempo of realism was, on the one hand, thoroughly immobilised like the objects of the taxidermist and the photographer, on the other hand an overexcited, vile acceleration on the verge of erupting out of the frame and into life. The development of realism is one that Craig views as grotesquely feverish, a high temperature that panics, bulges, itches, ignites and blazes the cool state of trance, the repulsive animation of what is and remains dead.<sup>34</sup> This is how he portrays the agitated and convulsive actor's despair at the draining of flesh and blood from theatre, though

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 62-4.

<sup>34</sup> Craig writes: "Up sprang portraits with flushed faces, eyes which bulged, mouths which leered, fingers itching to come out of their frames, wrists which exposed the pulse; all colours higgledy-piggeldy [sic]; all the lines in hubbub, like the ravings of lunacy. Form breaks into panic; the calm and cool whisper of life in trance which had once breathed out such an ineffable hope is heated, fired into a blaze and destroyed, and in its place – *realism*, the blunt statement of life, something everybody misunderstands whilst recognizing." *Ibid.*, 89. One wonders whether Craig had Oscar Wilde's doomed portrait of Dorian Gray (published 16 years earlier in 1891) in mind when he wrote this.

in actual fact he views him as hollow and ineffective as the hide of a dead animal, and, in an ironic act of ventriloquy, places the words “no life” in his mouth.

Just as he writes of the nascence of realism, so too in a potted anthropology he relates the degeneration of the puppet from religious and ritualistic idol made in the likeness of God, to lowly comedian, contemptible “funny little doll.” Craig’s description of the evolution of the puppet focuses on two characterising traits: its diminutive size and its jerky rhythm. Most people giggle at the thought of the puppet, when they “design a puppet on paper” (an interesting image of an image), they draw a stiff and comic-looking thing, mistaking gravity of face and calmness of body for blank stupidity and angular deformity. They think at once of the wires, writes Craig, of the stiff hands and the jerky movements. But it was not always so.

many years ago these figures had a rhythmical movement and not a jerky one; had no need for wires to support them, nor did they speak through the nose of a hidden manipulator. [Poor Punch, I mean no slight to you! You stand alone, dignified in your despair...] Did you think, ladies and gentlemen, that these puppets were always little things of but a foot high?

Indeed no! The puppet had once a more generous form than yourselves. Do you think that he kicked his feet about on a little platform six feet square, made to resemble a little old-fashioned theatre, so that his head almost touched the top of the proscenium? and do you think that he always lived in a little house where the door and windows were as small as a doll’s house, with painted window-blinds parted in the centre, and where the flowers of his little garden had courageous petals as big as his head?<sup>35</sup>

Originally, grieves Craig, this puppet was an autonomous, divine figure. It had no need for ventriloquism or puppetry, no voice to speak through it and no hand to support and operate it. Its movement, now jerky because of its dependency on an external source, was once smooth and rhythmic. Its body has “become stiff... [the] eyes have lost that infinite subtlety of seeming to see; now they only stare. They display and jingle their wires and are cocksure in their wooden wisdom.”<sup>36</sup> The narration is one of gradual de-animation. The puppet has died but is clumsily re-animated, confessing its artifice with a vacuous glare. Craig points to a sense of disillusionment, a view of the puppet’s ‘wires’ or mechanical viscera that blatantly show the operating mechanism, like the disillusioned faithful at the iconoclastic exposure of the Rood of Grace. In its risible appearance the puppet can scarcely stand upright, and is continuously prone downwards: “They enter only to fall on their back. They drink only to reel.”<sup>37</sup> It falls, revealing the illusion of verticality. The comic effect is Bergsonian, but also touches upon an uncanny shift in belief: “If we should laugh at and insult the memory of the puppet, we should

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 90-1.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

be laughing at the fall we have brought about in ourselves – laughing at the beliefs and images we have broken.”<sup>38</sup> The puppet becomes a fallen idol, and Craig’s purpose to reinvest it and the world with belief.<sup>39</sup> In the *Über-marions* notebooks he writes:

The world lacks and needs a Belief. A childish one – one full of complicated customs and ceremonies. Much of the belief which possessed the Egyptians – which made them perform all the ceremonies – all so childish and lovely – of the dead and for the Gods – and for the Nile – and for all the rest of it. A Belief full of Beauty. That is what I will try to find for myself, and for the world – passing it to them by means of my Über-marionette.<sup>40</sup>

This decline of belief has brought about a diminution of the puppet’s scale. Now disproportionate, it was once tall in stature, befitting of its exotic setting in the vast palace built on the banks of the Ganges.<sup>41</sup> The puppet was never intended as a plaything, and does not originate from the doll, although he is still the closest friend of children. His ancestors were holy images. Elsewhere, Craig vindicated the catholic “idol” as the ancestor of the puppet, referring to its destruction and secularisation:

But when the storm of the Reformation swept over England, and Henry VIII in his fight against the Pope despoiled the churches, the “miraculous” crucifixes, the little figures which performed the Nativity and Passion plays, were destroyed and the new religion cast out as idols what the old religion had sheltered as saints. Turned out from their altars we find the moving statuettes reappearing in a more secular guise as marionettes upon the ordinary stage.<sup>42</sup>

Craig wanted to undo this secularisation, and his ambitions for the über-marionette would not only redeem the actor and the art of theatre, it would enlarge the puppet back to its proper dimensions, lubricate its stiff joints, and return the sacred to its proper stage. “Born of wood and the lover of wood, he is content to obey his nature and remain wooden.”<sup>43</sup> Craig’s puppet would not be illusory deception, the wood does not transubstantiate into flesh, but remains inanimate, and it is man’s flesh that should transubstantiate, as it were, into wood.

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>39</sup> Eynat-Confino contextualises Craig’s notions of belief in relation to contemporary spiritual tendencies such as those of the English aesthetes Beardsley and Wilde (converted to Roman Catholicism), the writings of Freud and Rudolf Steiner, etc. But, as her study reveals, Craig’s main inspiration stemmed from the death-oriented religion of ancient Egypt.

<sup>40</sup> Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Gordon Craig collection, 3, cited in Eynat-Confino, 128.

<sup>41</sup> Craig’s idea of the puppet originating from India was influenced by Richard Pischel’s widely read book *The Home of the Puppet Play*, trans. M.C. Tawney (London: Luzac, 1902).

<sup>42</sup> Craig continues that the Puritan accusations against theatricality were a rejection of the human body on stage but *not* of the marionette. Craig under the pseudonym of Adolf Furst, “A Note on Marionettes,” *The Mask* 2 (October 1909): 72-6, 75. Craig’s views find parallels in Victoria Nelson’s notion of the holy image turned grotesque, laughable puppet in popular culture. See above.

<sup>43</sup> Craig, “Gentlemen, the Marionette!,” *The Mask* 5, 2 (October 1912), 95-7, 96.



From the degraded evolution of the marionette Craig moves on to elucidate the birth of acting, and again in this debased genesis a mimetic reversal is acted out whereby the live performer enacts a poor imitation of the marionette. Intriguingly, it is here that we return to our puppet princess, as in an often overlooked fragment Craig defines the inaugural instance of acting as the weakness and vanity of two women. Moving away from the temple into a space between the temple and the theatre, the puppet took up abode in the Far-Eastern coast. There came two women to look upon him, and intoxicated their minds. The entire performance reduces and transforms the structure of the gaze into a curious anti-Pygmalion configuration. It is not the man who looks upon the feminised image, pining for her animation; the puppet does not see the dancers, while the women not only see and yearn to be like him, but they imitate him as best they can, crying out a pitiable mantra of likeness, to vulgar effect.

He did not see them, his eyes were fixed on the heavens; but he charged them full of a desire too great to be quenched; the desire to stand as the direct symbol of the divinity of man. No sooner thought than done; and arraying themselves as best they could in garments ("like his" they thought), moving with gestures ("like his" they said) and being able to cause wonderment in the minds of their beholders ("even as he does" they cried), they built themselves a temple ("like his," "like his"), and supplied the demand of the vulgar, the whole thing a poor parody.

This is on the record. It is the first record in the East of the actor. The actor springs from the foolish vanity of two women who were not strong enough to look upon the symbol of godhead without desiring to tamper with it; and the parody proved profitable.... With the fading of the puppet and the advance of these women who exhibited themselves on the stage in his place, came that darker spirit called Chaos, and in its wake the triumph of the riotous personality.<sup>44</sup>

Like the princess, these dancers moved with puppet-like gestures, causing wonder (or seduction?) in the mind of their beholders. But whereas in our opening scene the dancer is forced into puppetry, here the women incline towards the puppet out of vanity and foolishness. Women are to blame for the triumph of realism, of ego-centred personality and presence. These women were not content to merely gaze, they had to absorb and imitate, and in so doing become subjects of the gaze, exhibitionists who offer themselves to the spectator.

This 'original sin' of Craig's theatrical genesis must be undone by a second 'coming,' as it were. The inaugural flawed imitation of the puppet must be exceeded by a new imitation of the puppet, one that does not lead to personality but to an empty depersonalised figure. Like Chinese whispers, a threefold degeneration of mimesis evolves throughout Craig's text. The marionette is an idol in the likeness of God, which becomes a poor and diminutive imitation of its original self; the actresses are in turn poor imitations of the marionette; and acting is a

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<sup>44</sup> Craig, "The actor and the Über-marionette," 93-4.

development of this fatuous emulation. From divinity to idol to doll, and, similarly, from marionette to actresses to realist acting. To a degree, there is something to be said for Craig's overall intention to remove the puppet from its characteristic feminisation. The etymological origins of both 'puppet' (from *pupa*, 'doll') and 'marionette' (diminutive of the female name 'Mary') point to a feminisation of the inanimate figure, and, in line with other historical instances of iconoclastic outbursts, many Protestant reformers would incite iconophobia by an appeal to gynophobia.<sup>45</sup> But Craig's response to the puppet's 'usurpation' by women was to place it firmly within the tradition of "the true masculine manner,"<sup>46</sup> which he characterised as a passionless, death-like art. Women were still among the foremost idolaters, intoxicated by the image, incapable of contemplating the symbol of godhead without falling into excessive exhibitionist corporeality.

Craig was a barefaced misogynist, highly critical of female actors, whom he considered unfit for the stage. This despite the fact that Ellen Terry, his mother, was a famous actress; that it was Eleonora Duse whom he called upon in declaring the actor's unsuitability for the stage, her quote heading his own article on the über-marionette; and, perhaps even more ironically, that his primary muse was a successful female dancer with whom he had a passionate and inspirational love affair: Isadora Duncan. In an anecdote about his mother and Henry Irving (the prototypical über-marionette), Craig contrasts Irving's deliberation with his mother's impulsiveness. Irving ponders how to cross the room, for "he disliked mere movement – and this dislike of his quite often decided him not to move at all." To Irving's perplexities Terry replies "Why not take a cab?"<sup>47</sup> Undoubtedly, Craig prefers Irving's quasi-paralysis to his mother's rapid motions and playful solution. It is telling that in his fascination with Isadora Duncan, he was particularly struck by her use of *stasis*, a condition of stillness that he believed was the chief virtue of the marionette. Craig enthusiastically described seeing Duncan perform for the first time in 1904 as "Quite still... Then one step back or sideways, and the music began again as she went moving on before or after it. Only just moving – not pirouetting... She was speaking in her own language... not echoing any ballet master... The dance ended, and again she stood quite still."<sup>48</sup> It is clear that his admiration for this movement quality was not a gendered form of pygmalionism, an immobilisation and domestication of women for the

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Shershow, *Puppets and "Popular" Culture*, 39-40, and 199-200. Shershow rightly points out that the modernist appropriation of the puppet is also an appropriation of the popular.

<sup>46</sup> Craig, "The actor and the Über-marionette," 85.

<sup>47</sup> Craig, "Irving seemingly perplexed," 1956, *Drama* 173 (1989): 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition, 1919-1989, 12.

<sup>48</sup> BBC radio talk cited in Francis Steegmuller, *Your Isadora* (New York: Random House and the New York Public Library, 1974), 23. On Isadora Duncan see Amy Koritz, "The Symbolist Dancer: The Performance Aesthetics of Isadora Duncan, Arthur Symons, and Edward Gordon Craig," *Gendering Bodies/Performing Art: Dance and Literature in Early Twentieth-Century British Culture* (The University of Michigan Press, 1995), 59-73; Deborah Jowitt, "The Search for Motion," *Time and the Dancing Image* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 69-102; Mark Franko, "The Invention of Modern Dance," *Dancing Modernism/Performing Politics* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 1-24; Nancy L.C. Ruyter, "Passionate Revolt: Isadora Duncan," *Reformers and Visionaries: The Americanization of the Art of Dance* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1979), 33-54; Dorée Duncan et al (eds.), *Life Into Art*, Daly, "The Natural Body."

benefit of the gaze of men. According to Craig's son, his response to seeing Isadora Duncan dance was one of both admiration and resentment, admiration for what had been for him the greatest artistic experience of his life, and resentment that such a revelation should come from a woman.<sup>49</sup> This led to the embryo of his concept of the future über-marionette, which was "something like a Greek statue – which could be made to move, and could be controlled like a marionette, but would not suffer from, or be affected by emotions – like Isadora."<sup>50</sup> But despite this apparently pygmalionic statement, Craig was as decisively hostile to the manipulation of women by men as he was to their display on stage. This is particularly clear in his condemnation of Dalcroze's Eurhythmic Gymnastics. He writes:

Herein lies the root-evil of the whole matter. Girls are employed like so much marble or gold... and Dalcroze, like Michelangelo, hacks away at them, turns them, bends them... and of course they like it. Excellent! Excellent that any and all girls should like being bent and turned by a man; ... it is an old virtue of theirs, but it has the disadvantage of it in no way conducing towards the production of a work of art.<sup>51</sup>

The director should *not* be a sculptor, although the theatrical material should be pliable and sculpture-like. The old and corrupt custom of women offering themselves as compliant Galateas to Pygmalion is to be undone. Even more so than man, woman is useless as material for the theatre, she must be left free to relish the mobility of her over-emotionality.<sup>52</sup>

Craig and Duncan were both in search of a new kind of movement and a neo-ritualistic mode of performance. Craig himself would state that the essence of all theatre is movement and rhythm, and that the father of the dramatist was the dancer, not the poet.<sup>53</sup> But despite his admiration for Duncan, her dances were not the ideal realisation of the choreographies of his über-marionette. The stillness which Craig so admired in Duncan is described in her autobiography as the search for her internal centre from which all movement could originate:

For hours I would stand still, my two hands folded between my breasts, covering the solar plexus. My mother often became alarmed to see me remain for such long intervals quite motionless as if in a trance - but I was seeking, and finally discovered, the central spring of all

<sup>49</sup> Edward Anthony Craig, *Gordon Craig: The Story of His Life* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1968), 191-192.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>51</sup> Craig under the pseudonym of John Balance, "Jacques Dalcroze and his School," *The Mask* 5, 1 (July 1912), 32-6, 34.

<sup>52</sup> Craig would even condemn the stage appearance of Sada Yacco, famous in Europe and notably one of the first female Japanese performers allowed to perform in her native Japan. Although he found oriental theatre, in particular Noh theatre, a major source of inspiration, the influences of Western acting, not to mention Western liberalism concerning women, in Madame Yacco would in Craig's view be responsible for the downfall of theatre and the contamination of Japanese tradition. Cf. Sang-Kyong Lee, "Edward Gordon Craig and Japanese Theatre," *Asian Theatre Journal* 17, 2 (2000): 215-235.

<sup>53</sup> Craig, "The Art of the Theatre, The First Dialogue," *On The Art of the Theatre*, 137.

movement, the crater of motor power, the mirror of vision for the creation of the dance – it was from this discovery that was born the theory on which I founded my school.<sup>54</sup>

Her aesthetic was far removed from any notion of puppetry and contrived movement. She was against ballet, for it taught the pupil that this spring was found in the centre of the back at the base of the spine, and that the limbs move from this axis, giving the result of “an articulated puppet” producing “artificial movement not worthy of the soul.” Her dancing was more akin to the acting theories of Stanislavski, who had seen her perform and admired her sensory basis for emotion retrieval. Both Duncan and Stanislavski believed that art was a culture of feeling, whereas Craig (and, we shall soon see, Meyerhold) held a profound distrust of psychology as an artistic motivating force.

Perhaps the main point Duncan and Craig shared in common was an admiring gaze towards antiquity. Undoubtedly influenced by the Delsartian technique of attitudes (cf. chapter 3), Duncan spent hours at the British Museum and other museums looking at vase paintings, bas-reliefs and sculptures, in order to source her movements.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, her early partner Raymond would draw silhouettes from the Greek vases at the Louvre, and of those published, some, according to Duncan, “were not from Greek vases at all, but me, dancing in the nude, photographed by Raymond, which were passed off as Greek vases.”<sup>56</sup> Unlike the *tableau vivant*, Duncan *became* the original prototype. It is as though she had been using these poses as pointers, notations to flesh-out into movement. Her early performances, some of which were performed in museums, were described as a series of graceful poses which passed in succession from one to another so rapidly that they became dance (almost like a smooth acceleration of the “cinematic” frames of *tableaux vivants*). When Duncan wrote of her dream of “finding a first movement from which would be born a series of movements *without my volition*, but as the unconscious reaction of the primary movement,”<sup>57</sup> we can rest assured that this pioneering feminist was not referring to an emptying of her self in order to enable an external agency – a director, choreographer, or indeed man – to manipulate her. “Always feel your movement within you first; otherwise your gestures resemble the movements of puppets.”<sup>58</sup> Movement would be the only force to dictate movement, and Duncan danced barefooted, loosely draped, (even pregnant!), improvising spontaneously from within herself, thus inaugurating the torque

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<sup>54</sup> Duncan, *My Life*, 58.

<sup>55</sup> In her 1902 article “The Dancer of the Future” (published in 1928), Duncan compared the endless fluidity of movement to a series of poses of static Greek images, which in her view all “presuppose another movement.” Thus, the statue of Hermes rests the ball of his foot on the wind, “for no movement is true unless suggesting a sequence of movements.” *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader*, eds. M. Huxley and N. Witts (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 157–63, 159. Similarly, one of her early dances, *La Primavera* (1899), was based on Botticelli and was performed at the New Gallery in London. Cf. Deborah Jowitt, “The Impact of Greek Art on the Style and Persona of Isadora Duncan,” *Proceedings Society of Dance History Scholars*, comp. C. L. Schlundt (Riverside, California: Society of Dance History Scholars, 1987), 199; Daly.

<sup>56</sup> Duncan, *My Life*, 53.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 59, my italics.

of contemporary dance.<sup>59</sup> No longer an external centre describing curves as in Kleist, but an internal centrifugal force expanding outwards. Her body was free from the restrictions of methodology, the constrictions of costume, and the dictatorship of an external voice to obey.<sup>60</sup> Duncan was anything but a trapped puppet princess.

But to return to Craig, perhaps the essential setback of his theory was his attempt to strip the puppet and the puppeteer of any umbilical connection, claiming a hands-free autonomy for what in essence flows forth from human hands. Human manipulation is responsible for the puppet's degradation. For

come across him when he is suspended in his quiet chamber of rest and you will be awed by his distinguished manner, but let a human being but touch him and he will act in the most outrageous manner. For these humans even make him copy the actors; they make him behave like a man in the street, whereas if he were left to himself he will do nothing wrong...<sup>61</sup>

Craig absolves the puppet from his mimetic relation to man, and abhors any further imitation in terms of movement quality. If in the first instance Craig proposes the puppet as an instrument more pliable, more obedient and further removed from the body of the puppeteer, here he wants to isolate it from any instrumentation, disable its puppet-ness. The puppet moves best when he is left untouched by the human pulse, when no movement translates from animate to inanimate. Whereas Kleist is extremely detailed in his mathematical description of how movement trickles down from one to the other, Craig was intent on severing the strings that enable interaction. The wires of the über-marionette would be neither "mechanical" nor "material," although what they were exactly Craig could not say.<sup>62</sup>

Nonetheless, although Craig sits on the cusp of modernism, automata were the last thing on his mind. His idea of the über-marionette was certainly not one of mechanisation. In an age in which technology was either heralded as emancipatory or condemned as the corrosion of modernism, the technology of the stage also needed revaluation. However, Craig's theories

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<sup>58</sup> Irma Duncan, *The Techniques of Isadora Duncan* (New York: Kamin, 1937), 33.

<sup>59</sup> Contrary to the idea of modernist mechanized movements, Hillel Schwartz identifies modernism with a kinaesthetic of spiralling twists. "Torque," *Incorporations*.

<sup>60</sup> Of her love affair with Craig she would later write that his "*amour propre*, his jealousy as an artist, would not allow him to admit that any woman could really be an artist... either Craig's Art or mine – and to give up mine I knew to be impossible." Edward Anthony Craig, *Gordon Craig*, 197.

<sup>61</sup> Craig, "A Note on Marionettes," 72. Echoing Kleist, he uncharacteristically writes "might it not perhaps be possible that at a later date we may have these little figures brought to so great a mechanical perfection that they may not need the assistance of that human machine, man?" (p. 73), and elucidates the potential use of mercury and magnets for such purposes. This stands in contradiction to his overall anti-technological stance, and although Craig experimented with various technical solutions to his Übermarionette (not to mention his inventions of stage and lighting machinery), he never adopted a technological aesthetic and certainly pales in comparison to the Futurists or Wyndham Lewis. Cf. below.

were more akin to the romanticism of Kleist than to the modernism of his peers. Unlike his contemporaries the Futurists, whose manifestos Craig published (and criticised) in his journal, and the theory of Biomechanics of Vsevolod Meyerhold, whom he strongly influenced and eventually met in 1935, Craig's romantic views of the inanimate performer were anti-industrial and anti-technological. The Futurists, who had also spoken enthusiastically of replacing the live actor with an inanimate counterpart, adored technology, emphasised speed and locomotion, and nihilistically wanted to destroy ancient tradition,<sup>63</sup> all in clear opposition to Craig's appraisal of a slow rhythm inspired by the traditions of Greco-Roman and Medieval theatre. They produced several mechanical ballets in which the actors were (characterised as) mechanical or mechanized props acted, and their eulogy of technology seemed to facilitate the implementation of their ideas. Like Craig, Meyerhold's stylised theatre aimed for the actor to "study the plasticity of the statue,"<sup>64</sup> but unlike Craig, he implicitly endorsed the mechanism ideal, introducing modernist notions of labour-efficiency and industrial time-motion into theatre. Continuing la Mettrie's notion of the man-machine,<sup>65</sup> Meyerhold invented a system that transformed the human body into a controllable object on stage, standardizing movement in accordance with the laws of mechanization (highly influenced by Taylorism and Reflexology). He established an entire gamut of emotions in the actor through the arrangement of musculature, which would in turn create a predetermined effect on the

<sup>62</sup> Craig, "Gentlemen, the Marionette!," 97. To this he adds "The wires which stretch from Divinity to the soul of the Poet are wires which might command him; ... has God no more such threads to spare... for one more figure? I cannot doubt it... I hope to... draw those tangle-able wires out of your thoughts."

<sup>63</sup> Craig published the first English translation of the Marinetti's "Futurism and the Theatre: A Futurist Manifesto" in *The Mask* 6, 3 (January 1914): 188-93. In his own commentary to the manifesto he writes that they should be taken seriously, but in the same breath that the manifesto is an "impertinent piece of ignorance." Cf. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism," *Marinetti's Selected Writings*, trans. R.W. Flint (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1973), 19-24 (originally published in *Le Figaro* in 1909). The second manifesto could be said to relate almost directly to Craig "Up to now literature has exalted a pensive immobility, ecstasy, and sleep. We intend to exalt aggressive action, a feverish insomnia, the racer's stride, the mortal leap, the punch and the slap." The futurists had human actors mime mechanisation in becoming machine guns, aeroplanes, etc., worked with actual puppets of varying dimensions, and eventually wanted to abolish the human actor from the stage, letting other scenic components such as lights, sounds, moving elements, even "actor-gases" replace him through personification. For an in depth examination see Michael Kirby and Victoria N. Kirby, *Futurist Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1986). On Marinetti's technophilia in relation to Wyndham Lewis, see Hal Foster, "Prosthetic Gods," *Modernism/Modernity* 4, 2 (1997): 5-38. More generally on the marionette actor in the 1920s, see Didier Plassard, *L'Acteur en Effigie: Figures de l'Homme Artificiel dans le Théâtre des Avant-Gardes Historiques: Allemagne, France, Italie* (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1992).

<sup>64</sup> Vsevolod Meyerhold, "First Attempts at a Stylized Theatre," 1908, *Meyerhold on Theatre*, trans. and ed. E. Braun (New York: Hill & Wang, 1969), 49-58. This is not the context in which to elaborate on Meyerhold's notion of Biomechanics, primarily because his concern with a labour-oriented socialist mechanized body deviates from the focus of the dissertation. A rigorous discussion of the technique of Biomechanics can be found in Alma Law and Mel Gordon, *Meyerhold, Eisenstein and Biomechanics* (Jefferson, North Carolina and London: McFarland & Company, 1996). See also Edward Braun, *Meyerhold: A Revolution in Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1995); Robert Leach, *Vsevolod Meyerhold* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Marjorie L. Hoover, *Meyerhold: The Art of Conscious Theatre* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1974); Paul Schmidt (ed. and trans.), *Meyerhold at Work* (New York, London: Applause, 1980); A.K. Gladkov, *Meyerhold Speaks/Meyerhold Rehearses*, trans. A. Law (Newark: Harwood Academic Publisher, 1997); Mel Gordon, "Meyerhold's Biomechanics," *Acting (Re)Considered: Theories and Practices*, ed. B. Zarilli (London & New York: Routledge, 1995), 85-107.

<sup>65</sup> La Mettrie touched upon the man-machine's inherent theatricality writing "Is it not a purely mechanical way that the body shrinks when it is struck with terror at the sight of an unforeseen precipice, that the eyelids are lowered at the menace of a blow...?" La Mettrie, 131-2. Joseph Roach's postulates two opposed camps of acting theory, the mechanistic one, epitomised in his view by Craig, and the vitalist organicist theory of sensibility and spontaneity. For reason which by now should be clear, I disagree with Roach's categorization of Craig as mechanistic in his otherwise excellent book *The Players Passion*.

audience. For Meyerhold “realized that as soon as he tried to improve the puppet’s mechanism it lost part of its charm,” and therefore rather than enhance the puppet he attempted to *puppetize* the human actor, inspired by “its incomparable movements, its expressive gestures achieved by magic known to it alone, its angularity which reaches the heights of true plasticity.”<sup>66</sup> Thus he supplanted the puppet-idol so dear to Craig with the puppet-machine, and within this mechanical model enjoyed a productive creative output. Craig’s visionary theories, in contrast, remained irresolutely nebulous, more of an inspiration for others than a materialisable possibility, more congruent on the page than on the stage.

Perhaps the most interesting beneficiary of his theories was the Bauhaus artist, choreographer and performer Oskar Schlemmer (1888-1943). Schlemmer was admittedly influenced by Kleist and Craig’s theories of the puppet’s supremacy over the live actor, writing in 1924: “Man, the animated being, would be banned from view in this mechanistic organism. He would stand as ‘the perfect engineer’ at the central switchboard, from where he would direct this feast for the eyes.”<sup>67</sup> Interestingly, his background as a painter and sculptor led him to conceive of a solution which involved not the banishing of wo/man from the visual stage, but his/her disguise through the use of costumes, total body masks (equally wearable by women).<sup>68</sup> These enabled him to metamorphose the human body by geometrising its organic nature and purposely misleading and invalidating its conformity to organic and mechanical laws. Through costumes which emphasised either cubical shapes (creating “*ambulant architecture*”), human typification (“*marionette*”), the laws of motion (“*technical organism*”), or metaphysical forms (“*dematerialisation*”), Schlemmer not only transformed the physique of the performers but also their kinetic structure, their range and quality of movement. “Might not the dancers be real puppets, moved by strings, or better still, self-propelled by means of a precise mechanism, at most directed by remote control?”<sup>69</sup> However, Schlemmer did not want to replace man, whom he viewed as the measure of all things, but rather contain and transform him through

<sup>66</sup> Meyerhold on Theatre, 128.

<sup>67</sup> Oskar Schlemmer, “Man and Art Figure,” *The Theater of the Bauhaus*, ed. W. Gropius, trans. A.S. Wensinger (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 17-46, 22. Julian Olf locates this dictator engineer-designer-director in line with Wagner, Adolph Appia, Craig, and Artaud. “The Man Marionette Debate in Modern Theatre.” *Educational Theatre Journal* 26, 4 (1974): 488-494. See also Schlemmer, *Man: Teaching Notes from the Bauhaus*, ed. H. Kuchling, trans. J. Seligman (London: Lund Humphries, 1971); *Théâtre et Abstraction (L’Espace du Bauhaus)*, trans. E. Michaud (Lausanne: L’Age D’Homme, 1978). For a contextualisation of Schlemmer in relation to German Modern dance see Susan Allene Manning and Melissa Benson, “Interrupted Continuities: Modern Dance in Germany,” *Moving History/Dancing Cultures*, 218-27; Laurence Louppe, “Les danses de Bauhaus: une généalogie de la modernité,” *Oskar Schlemmer*, 7 May-1 August 1999, Musée Cantini, exhibition catalogue, 171-93.

<sup>68</sup> In contrast to Craig, Schlemmer often employed female performers, and his costumes aimed at neutering the gendered body into a sexless (or sexful) object.

<sup>69</sup> Diary entry from 1926, *The Letters and Diaries of Oskar Schlemmer*, ed. T. Schlemmer, trans. K. Winston (Connecticut, Wesleyan University Press, 1972), 197. In an earlier entry from 1922 he had cited Kleist’s similar suggestion, adding: “Life has become so mechanized, thanks to machines and technology we cannot possibly ignore, that we are intensely aware of man as machine and the body as a mechanism...” (126).

the remote-control enabled by costume, thus making him his own dancing “lawgiver.”<sup>70</sup> In 1931, he clarified:

I never created a “mechanical ballet,” intriguing though it might be to construct figurines and sets directed by an automatic mechanism. The relatively slight gain in types of possible spatial movement would not justify the high cost of the apparatus. Even the mechanical qualities of the puppet are only relative, since it is not an automaton like E.T.A Hoffmann’s Olympia; the movement is produced by the articulation of the human hand. The disk figures in my ‘Figural Cabinet’ are carried and manipulated by disguised dancers: thus the fluid human element always forms part of the game.<sup>71</sup>

It was the unsatisfactory rigidity of sculpture that drew Schlemmer to dance, and the inadequate realism and flexibility of the human body that led him to create apparels that hid and hindered the body’s plasticity. The constriction of the costume resulted in a form of control over the body, its expressiveness and choreographic potential, reducing the variables of the human dancer through an exoskeletal armour-like mask. In a lecture he gave in Zurich in 1931, he stated:

Spatially plastic, for they are so to speak coloured and metallic sculptures which, worn by the dancers, move in space, whereby the physical sensation is significantly influenced, in such a manner that the more the apparently violated body fuses with the costume, the more it attains new forms of dance expression manifestations.<sup>72</sup>



A naked woman tapes a deconstructed chair to her body, each addition becoming a constricting costume, forcing her into upright verticality, unable to bend, to sit, to walk, to turn. The chair, an implement for the repose of the weary standing body, conceived of for a body that can zigzag into sitting, is now the stiffening brace that binds her jointed limbs upwards, orthopaedic. Toe straightened to shin; hand, wrist, elbow, shoulder, lengthened

<sup>70</sup> Schlemmer, “Man and Art Figure,” 20. Reconstructions of Schlemmer’s dances have been attempted in *Man and Mask*, by Anthony Roland (videocassette, 1970); *Das Triadische Ballett: Ein Film in Drei Teilen*, (videocassette, 1970). Around the same years as his *Triadic Ballet* (1922), Karel Čapek’s play *R.U.R.* (1918, first performed 1921) dramatized man’s obsolescence after a robot revolution and industrial take-over, ironically employing human actors in costumes. Were there more space it would be interesting to relate this human performance of its own disappearance to chapter 4.

<sup>71</sup> Diary entry, 1931, *The Letters*, 283.

<sup>72</sup> Cited in Karin von Maur, *Oskar Schlemmer*, trans. A. Engel (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972), 43.



outwards; neck and head aligned and straightened. Taping completed, she holds the position in stillness for a few seconds, the only danceable option.<sup>73</sup>



In an act of apparent violation, the body becomes the mask it wears, loses its self, succumbs to the shape it inhabits.<sup>74</sup> The costumed is possessed by the costume. *In the attempt to render oneself hollow, the actor must form a second skin.* Once more the Chess-player comes to mind, in that the human pulse is quietened, depersonalised and removed through its containment within a secondary casing. In many ways Schlemmer's costumes could have been an appropriate incarnation of the über-marionette, although Craig, in his usual contrariness, would have probably disagreed. Schlemmer's enthusiasm about the possibilities offered by technological advancement – "scientific apparatus of glass and metal, the artificial limbs developed by surgery, the fantastic costumes of the deep-sea diver and the modern soldier ..."<sup>75</sup> – should not be read as mere technological euphoria. Although this imagery evokes the traumas of war,<sup>76</sup> referencing the wounded body in need of prosthetic limbs as well as the soldier's costume tailored for protection, ultimately Schlemmer's figures appear to humorously dance on the patterned grid of the stage like chess-pieces exhausting their geometrical possibilities: "Mechanistic cabaret, metaphysical eccentricity, spiritual tightrope walking, ironic *variété*...."<sup>77</sup> In the use of materials such as aluminium, rubber, celluloid and wire, the costumes often resembled the outmoded protective armour of a fencing match turned playfully formal. Schlemmer's utopian sculpture/performer was anything but a politicised techno-fascist figure hailing the potential of a military aesthetic.<sup>78</sup> The emotional performer

<sup>73</sup> La Ribot, "Chair 2000," tableau from *Still Distinguished*, performed at South London Gallery, January 2001. Schlemmer created a costume that similarly transformed and highlighted the body's jointed-ness, entitled "Pole Dance."

<sup>74</sup> Alfred Jarry had similarly advocated the mask in theatre, thus forcing the actor into expressive qualities. The actor Gémier, reduced to the capacity of a puppet in the midst of the pandemonium of the audience, later wrote: "imprisoned in the carcass, I was hot... I was terribly furious. Up to this point I had always gotten the better of the audience; feeling my impotence under the mask made me boil." Cited in Melzer, 117.

<sup>75</sup> Schlemmer, "Man and Art Figure," 28-29.

<sup>76</sup> Schlemmer fought on the German side in the First World War, and was wounded twice in 1914 and 1916, although how much of this can be read into his work is questionable.

<sup>77</sup> Diary entry from 1929, *The Letters*, 242.

<sup>78</sup> Although in the early days the Bauhaus school had self-proclaimed itself a "cathedral of socialism," when, in 1933, the Nazis forced its closure, Schlemmer wrote to Joseph Goebbels (Hitler's minister for propaganda) saying that it was a mistake to claim that they were involved in politics: "Artists are fundamentally unpolitical and must be so... It is always humanity with which they are concerned..." *Ibid.*, 311. Several Bauhaus artists were exhibited as part of the Nazis' 'degenerate art' exhibition in 1937.

A different reading might follow Klaus Theweleit's *Male Fantasies*, vol 2, trans. E. Carter and C. Turner (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989) who writes of the hardened armour-like body of the fascist male as a compensatory "steel figure" finding its apotheosis in the machine, guaranteeing emotional control and expurgating the threat of female fluid liquidity (cf. also Hal Foster, "Armor Fou: The Works of Max Ernst and Hans Bellmer," *October* 56 (1991): 65-97). I would be hard pressed to categorize Schlemmer within a fascist aesthetic, although I think interestingly so much of the aesthetic of a mechanized body does cohere to the formal qualities of armour. I have attempted to read a more organic view of this armour-like mechanization through the comparison with insects, which somehow sidesteps cybernetic euphoria to accommodate thinkers such as Craig, who was anti-technological.

condemned by Craig was abstracted and depersonalised through Schlemmer's body masks, turned into a bizarrely shaped and coloured pantomimic dancer. These string-less marionettes first de-humanized, then re-humanised the machine from behind/within its shell, and indeed Schlemmer cautioned against mechanization for its own sake: "This materialistic and practical age has in fact lost the genuine feeling for play and the miraculous. Utilitarianism has gone a long way in killing it. Amazed at the flood of technological advance, we accept these wonders of utility as being already the perfected art form, while actually they are only prerequisites for its creation."<sup>79</sup> Schlemmer's dancers are *not* prosthetically enhanced technological beings – hands, for instance, are not claw-like contraptions but rather vectors of movement. Technology is used for its ornamental non-utilitarian effects, possibly to reawaken the theatrical "feeling for play and the miraculous." Indeed, in his elaborate diagram of the stage included in the "Man and Art Figure" essay, Schlemmer placed theatre midway between religious cult activity and folk entertainment, the temple and the fairground show, the priest and the jester. For one "should have deep respect and deference for any action performed by the human body, especially on the stage, that special realm of life and illusion, that second reality in which everything is surrounded with the nimbus of magic..."<sup>80</sup>

Schlemmer's costumes were not military shields but camouflaging surfaces, second skins through which occasionally a face, hand or foot might slip through. In 1940 he would write "In the days to come I shall devote myself to the cult of surface,"<sup>81</sup> echoing his predilection for costume in painting. Perhaps, as Schwartz writes, parallel to military developments in camouflage techniques, this Cult of the Surface flourished specifically within the post-World War II program of modern art.<sup>82</sup> According to Taylor, skin and surface are emblematic of the contemporary virtualization of the real and the prominence of the interfaces in our current world of simulacra, where behind every surface there is yet another surface – "hides that hide nothing... nothing but other hides... surfaces know no depth yet are not simply superficial."<sup>83</sup> This was the spectatorial vision of the witnesses of the chess-playing automaton, where each layer seemed to hide another, like Russian dolls. Nevertheless, I would argue that Schlemmer's costumes do not evoke an infinite layer upon layer of surfaces, although they do hide one body in order to suggest another. Rather, it would seem that one anatomical structure is replaced with another, through an almost orthopaedic, brace-like epidermis. The articulations of surface impose mobility or stiffness upon the internal joints, thus re-educating the body's movements according to Kleistian mathematical and mechanical laws. In this exoskeletal reversal of inside and out, one wonders whether the spectators of Schlemmer's performances

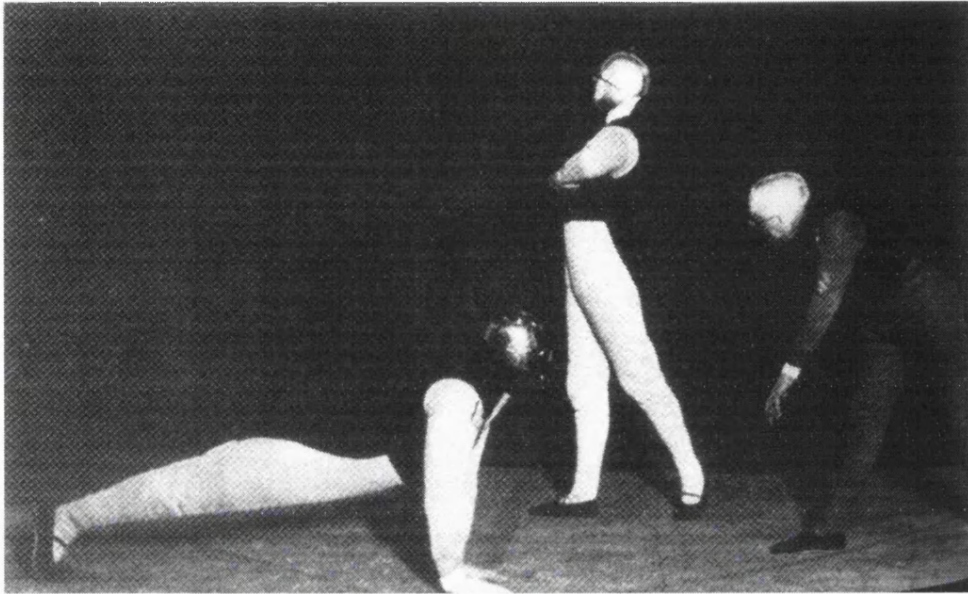
<sup>79</sup> Schlemmer, "Man and Art Figure," 31. This is coherent with the Bauhaus' utopian combination of arts and crafts.

<sup>80</sup> Diary entry from 1929, *The Letters*, 243

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 381. Between 1938-40 Schlemmer was forced to earn a living doing decorative painting jobs and, after the outbreak of the war, camouflage markings for buildings.

<sup>82</sup> Schwartz, *The Culture of the Copy*, 202.

sought to discern the body within, behind, below... does the puppeteering dancer become the homunculus within, or does he merely disappear and dematerialise in the onion-skin of costume, as invisible/visible as a bunraku-operator? Does double-vision still take place when the split body is collapsed into one?



21. Oskar Schlemmer, *Gesture Dance* with Schlemmer, Siedhoff and Kaminsky, 1926.

Why wish for the death of the actor, the actor's transformation into inanimate malleable matter? It might suggest a cultural, personal, or epochal dissatisfaction with the carrier of authorship; the living actor is not hollow enough, not "ventriloquiseable" enough, not submissive enough to the voice and will of another, and is therefore better off as a silent dancer. It professes disgust with chance, ego, psychology; nausea at an art that is essentially artificial, fraudulently posing as realism. The human body moves at a rhythm either too slow (for the Futurists) or over-accelerated (for Craig); it reveals too much of the person behind the character, it is not 'actor' enough. These discontents seem inevitably accompanied by a desire for a single god-like dictatorial artistic vision, captain of the ship, king of the monarchy, engineer at the switchboard, the characteristic modernist obsession with a total theatre and a central charismatic director (often aligned with contemporaneous proto-fascist politics).<sup>84</sup> In the attempt to control the live actor (without killing him off the stage), the methods proposed above were primarily concerned with delimiting the expressive and kinetic potential of the

<sup>83</sup> Taylor, 145.

<sup>84</sup> Craig flirted with fascism while based in Italy, and tried unsuccessfully to interest Mussolini in funding his ambitious theatrical schemes. By contrast, he did persuade Count Kessler, the "red" count of the Weimar Republic, to fund several such projects. See Taxisidou, "Puppets, Actors and Directors: Edward Gordon Craig and the European *Avant Garde*," *Miscelânea: A Journal of English and American Studies* 20 (1999): 73-84, who writes: "Craig was never an articulate or 'theoretical' fascist, but his search for a totalising theory which would restore a collective dimension to the theatre and construct the quasi-religious figure of the director certainly attracted him to the ideology of fascism." (75). Cf. Foster on Marinetti in relation to Italian Fascism.

actor. The jointedness given to sculptures to enable lifelike mobility is reversed, and the fluidity of human ligaments is 'rusted' into a more jagged movement quality. Meyerhold formulated a concise physical vocabulary bordering on human mechanisation using outer musculature; Schlemmer constructed costumes that forced the dancer into specific choreographic principles. Within these schemas the theorists themselves could easily switch between being the actor/dancer from within as well as the director/choreographer of the performer from without. Craig, on the other hand, never quite managed to embody his ideal actor (abandoning acting at an early stage of his career) or his ideal operator/director/choreographer. He could not articulate an ideal puppet or puppeteer, nor find the wires that would join them. Craig wanted the perfect malleable object, human or inanimate, but he knew not how to operate, intervene upon, get inside or wear it.

What in the actor comes from within, in the puppet comes from without, floats off its surface. Yet, when the one inhabits the other, behind or inside a mask, the movements, expressions of the outer layer, appear dictated from elsewhere. In this string-less marionette *interiority is veiled as exteriority*. The puppet-like actor suggests a split between presence and what might be motivating that presence. It as though the actor, too "original" as it were, too embodied, must retract into mediated disembodiment, projecting the original through the copy. Rather than act, the puppet-actor merely *moves*. Perhaps the reason bodily armour, *a second skin*, prevailed as a solution to this desire for a 'dead' actor in the above examples is because it enables a compression of puppet and puppeteer, resolving questions of control through abridging the gap between animator and animated. The empowerment of manipulating the inanimate becomes simultaneously a debilitation in being subjected to that same control of which one is master. At once immune, hollow, dead – and alive, palpitating, motivating movement, though vulnerably constricted. This enshrined body has become the animating force within its own statuary relic, the prototype speaking, acting, giving life through the inanimate. Presence is disguised as absence, agency as lack of agency.

## *Conclusion*

This thesis set out to explore a constellation of histories of the body/object on stage, and the ways in which it takes on or denies agency and presence. We saw how the animate and the inanimate functioned as puppet, scapegoat, armour, surrogate, *body* to one another. The research revealed the increasing prominence of choreographic movement as an indication of presence, a disclosure of absence, a strategy of depersonalising and disguising presence as absence. Through the spectators' speculations, attention was acutely drawn to choreographies of agency, generating conjectures regarding what (or who) is animating who (or what), and how. We oscillated constantly between object and subject, between spectatorship and embodiment, between looking and being/enacting. This brought up complications in the ways in which belief was structured and restructured, confusing choreographic agencies and interrogating boundaries. Continuities and variations emerged between incorrupt cadavers and tableaux vivants; relics and prostheses; articulated crucifixes, anatomical models and automata; medieval props, the chess-playing automaton and puppet-like acting techniques or costumes. Correspondingly, we followed enduring beliefs in animated objects and their transformation or obsolescence. Throughout, our main proposition has been that these beliefs survived somehow through theatrical performativity, on the stage. From tableaux vivants to automata to puppet-actors, theatre has proved the prime site for the animation of the inanimate, or the de-animation of the animate.

The problem of agency and presence has often led to issues of control and subjection. My constant attempt has been to subvert such master-slave dynamics. For example, my reading of tableaux vivants posited self-motivated stillness against theories of the objectifying gaze. The notion of a puppet-like actor, as studied in chapter 6, similarly brings in the director's desire for complete control exerted over the subject on stage, and yet in my reading this finds solution through the self-inflicted restrictions of Schlemmer's costumes, which enable the actor and the director to combine control and lack of it in one single body, albeit clothed in a second skin. Indeed, the choreography of a single body proves one of the most efficacious strategies for transforming the problematic dualism of control and subjection, empowerment and debilitation. Through those chapters which focus on the single yet intrinsically fractured or superimposed multiple body of the live performer on stage, I have hoped to enable a reconfiguration of the master-slave dichotomy: the poser in a tableau, who glazes over in rigor

mortis only to return at will to fluid mobility (chapter 3); the body carrying and carried by a prosthetic limb, or simulating such alternation of animate and inanimate (chapter 5); the performer encased in a sculptural body that depersonalises the actor without killing him off (chapter 6). Dynamics of vocal and choreographic agency are constantly displaced in the examples cited here. Almost every image or performer we have looked at seems somehow to choose to abdicate authorship<sup>1</sup> (rather than be a victim of suppression), and both object and subject appear to demonstrate a marked propensity towards becoming a vessel, a container, a body to another... in short, a *relational image* or a *transubstantiated object*.

Similarly, just as the compacted body can suggest resolutions to conflicts of dictatorship and enslavement, the compacted body can also, to some extent, reconcile belief and disbelief. The displacement of agency proved troubling in the history of efficacious images due to the recurrent accusations or denials of a second body, a hidden prototype/causal agent manipulating the object from above, within, behind, aside, etc.. Even when, as in some of the iconoclastic attacks of the Reformation, the allegation was that there is no possible operator, that the object is opaquely non-intercessionary, there remained the denunciation of a hierarchical structure (i.e. Catholicism) employing such objects in order to deceive and deprive the believers. The puppet is the intercessionary figure par excellence. To recall Kleist, the suspended marionette reveals a two-way impulse: the upward pull of the operator and its non-resistance to gravity. The mechanism of the marionette choreographically elucidates both disbelief and belief. As we saw in chapters 1-2, according to the mocking disbeliever, the inanimate object-idol shames its idolators "because through them these gods are made to stand, lest they fall on the ground. If any one sets one of them upright, it cannot move of itself; and if it is tipped over, it cannot straighten itself" (*Baruch-Letter of Jeremiah* 6:26-27), whereas according to the believer the dead body resurrects (from *re-surgere*, 'to rise again') from inanimate horizontality into vertical movement. Agency and non-agency, presence and non-presence within the object, can persuasively coexist on the stage, in the theatrical context, long after the age of the miraculous object has become for the most part (and predominantly in the West) obsolete. Images, idols, icons or speaking crucifixes nowadays can rarely perform miracles without slipping into the category of technological device or deception, yet the space of the stage enables a particular mode of performativity and spectatorship in which breath-taking suspension can prevail.

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<sup>1</sup> The puppet is emblematic of this tendency. Shershow examines the trope of authorial sovereignty with reference to the puppet as *embodiment* of the theological authorship of the author/creator/director (20, 54). This follows Foucault's notion of the "author function," which can exceed the individual to encompass "several selves... several subjects." Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?," *The Foucault Reader*, ed. P. Rabinow (Middlesex: Penguin, 1984), 101-20, 113. Foucault adds "The author... is the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning." (119) This relates to the subversive function of puppetry, whereby the puppet can say what its ventriloquist cannot.

The object-subject amalgam we have looked at serves as mediator, and this mediating function splits it into two bodies or entities. Only when the living actor willingly takes on the role of the statue or puppet, does the body collapse back into “one,” or rather, one part mediates the other in constantly shifting patterns of control. Hierarchies are collapsed and belief is self-induced. There is no fixed dynamic of control and subjection. Animation and de-animation flit across both the body and the stage in mercurial patterns of evanescence and presence.



The potential of this study opens out to new areas and questions which I hope to be able to address in the near future. The thesis ended with Schlemmer, just after world war II, but there is much scope for further research focusing on Tadeusz Kantor (briefly referred to at the end of chapter 1), who was active between 1944-1990.<sup>2</sup> A potential chapter on his work would bridge the historical gaps, bringing the trajectory through world war II into the present. Furthermore, Kantor himself cited several of the references and authors examined here, in particular Kleist and Craig. More importantly in light of the above conclusion, some of Kantor's plays, such as *The Dead Class* (1975), split the actor into two coexisting, interchangeable bodies on stage: the live performer and his inanimate replica. This sculptural object is at once imitation of the actor, body cast, double, *descendant* – as well as model for the actor, *ascendant*, progenitor. Double-vision is here a deliberate theatrical strategy.

In some ways, the fascination with puppet-like acting is in fact a fascination with the pre-cinematic or cinematic equivalent on stage. As with Kantor's sculptural doubles, contemporary performance often plays with the actors' cinematic doubles on stage, alternating dizzying fast-forwards and rewinds, flashes forward and flashbacks.<sup>3</sup> Scenes can be repeated, endlessly, without variation. Digital editing techniques render the live performance even more malleable, not only in terms of potential illusion, but also in terms of choreographies. Cinema loops movement, and sequences can be spliced into ever smaller fragments which can become trapped in minute tics and repetitive acts, thus dictating choreography and timing.<sup>4</sup> The role of marionettes in late twentieth-century theatre significantly posits “issues of living, dying, disintegration, and disappearance”<sup>5</sup> that are also played out in much recent performance. The twentieth-century's obsession with a depersonalised actor is parallel, perhaps, to the

<sup>2</sup> The most comprehensive book on Kantor in English to date is *A Journey Through Other Spaces: Essays and Manifestos by Tadeusz Kantor, 1944-1990*, trans. and ed. M. Kobińska (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> For example *Roadmetal Sweetbread*, performed by Stationhouse Opera, at ICA, London, 1999; or *To You, the Birdie*, performed by The Wooster Group at Riverside Studios, London, May 2002.

<sup>4</sup> I am thinking of the artist Mark Dean's microsurgical editing of old footage (exhibited at Laurent Delaye Gallery, London, 2002), or my own piece 'Brujeria,' not included in the attached videotape.

<sup>5</sup> Heidi Gilpin, “Lifelessness in Movement, or how do the Dead Move? Tracing Displacement and Disappearance for Movement Performance,” *Corporealities*, ed. S.L. Foster (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 106-28, 116.

contemporary fascination with the dual vision of the live and the virtual performer, which alternate, mimic, prefigure and lapse behind one another.



## *Appendix*

### A.

#### *Videos*

Together with the written component of the dissertation, I have included several extracts of my own work, some based on performance or performative acts, others which play more specifically on the medium of video/film/photography. Whereas the thesis circumvents the domain of film studies, my position as an artist is inevitably aligned with video and therefore indebted to the history of cinema. All the same, even when the work uses the medium of video to create illusion, I would still claim that my work prioritises the *sculptural metamorphosis of the body-in-motion*, which can be conveyed either in live performance or in filmed/documented/manipulated documentation of performance. It becomes hard to disentangle the live performance from the lens of the camera documenting it, the eye of the witness, as it were, and I deliberately play on the ambiguity between these layers.

The focus of my artwork tends to be on the effects of one body upon another: gravitation, levitation, mesmerism, immobilisation, entrance. This affected body becomes soft and pliable, merging with the other body; expands kaleidoscopically; retains the memory of a previous body (a phantom or prosthetic limb); retracts or hardens in defence. I try to make visible the surrounding forces that emanate from the body, show them as both empowering and debilitating, acting as a protective barrier or as a site of entrance for manipulation. I draw attention to the ambiguity and irresolution of controlling power dynamics, of violence and of subjection.

Over the past year and a half I have been working on an umbrella project entitled *The Conjuror's Assistant*, which looks at the ways in which the female body functions in magic as a figure to be animated, disjointed, reconstructed, entranced, levitated, boxed in, puppeteered or ventriloquised. This has involved performance projects, videos based on performative actions and/or manipulated archival footage, and photographic works. Many of these explore conventional magic tricks “turned on their head,” as it were, providing a glimpse into the underside of magic and deconstructing the power structures (choreographic; gender-based; reversing the roles of the one who ‘knows’ and the one who ‘shows’; etc.) of magician/assistant.

Many of the works toy with flimsy illusion which only just sustains itself, transparently revealing its mechanism so that the viewer is at once seduced whilst remaining critically aware. Other works reflect more directly on the technology of the moving image as an instrument which *produces* as well as *critiques* illusion.

The extracts included here have been exhibited in varying dimensions as projections or on a monitor, as a looped installation or a one-off screening, in the following exhibitions:

*Con-Art*, Site Gallery, Sheffield (2002)

*I put a spell on you*, Bezalel Gallery, Tel-Aviv, Israel (2001)

*Art in the Bar*, Chapter Arts, Cardiff (2002)

*New Contemporaries*, Camden Arts Centre, London, and Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, Sunderland (2001)

*LIFT (London International Festival of Theatre) club*, HMS president, London (2001)

*East End Collaborations, Platform 2001*, London (2001)

*Onedotzero uncut*, ICA, London (2001)

A.A. Silver Gallery, Tel-Aviv, Israel (2001)

*G-niale filmfest 2001*, Stralsund, Germany (2001)

### **Synopses:**

***'I Put a Spell on You'*** (2001), 04:07

Reversing the stereotypical suspension trick where he 'stands' and she 'lies,' archival footage is digitally manipulated to show a magician suspended horizontally whilst his female assistant is vertically upright. As he moves his hands in sensuous theatrical gestures over her abdomen, luring her forwards (as opposed to upwards), she slowly drifts, advancing towards his abdomen. His gestures are distorted to appear almost liquefying, sexualising the grid their intersected bodies create. Gradually her stomach swells and appears almost impregnated by the caress his magical fingers, which appear to be manipulating invisible strings. The interest in magic (cf. chapter 4 and appendix B) stems from the particular gestural rhetoric of showing, demonstrating, as opposed to psychological acting.

***'Eclipse'*** (2001), 04:04 (extract from longer loop)

Two figures appear naked and blindfolded in an almost sub-aquatic blue circular room. They seek each other, and in a blink of an eye exchange positions to become the other they were groping for. One body is sucked into the other body with a sharp gasp of air, to evoke the dimension of breath within the space. There is but one lung. Each contains the other,

breathing each other in, colliding into the same body. Power dynamics of scale, visibility (seeing and being seen), passive/active, are constantly shifting.

*'Torso'* (2000), 02:07 (extract from longer loop)

A disembodied female torso, reminiscent of a classical statue, flickers on the screen in quivering movements to the soundtrack of a chorus of hyperventilation, oscillating between the erotic and the hysterical. Although throughout the dissertation fragmentation is viewed in a positive, non-threatening light, here it is challenged and contextualised in relation to gender. The dismembered body experiences panic as it cannot hold itself upright, lacking verticality or the surrogate for verticality which is the pedestal.

*'The Ubermarionette'* (2001), Part documentation, part reworking of a performance-installation devised and directed by Aura Satz with Sam Birt & Marie-Louise Flexen, performed at the Garage in November 2001. (edited and digitally manipulated extract, see appendix B. below).

*'Curiouser & Curiouser'* (2001), two framed photographs (30x20cm), reprinted on video jacket, with thanks to Ruth Blue.

Two figures are eclipsed behind a tailor's dummy, legless as if wedged in the floor or magically levitating. The bewildered facial expressions evoke the metamorphic body of *Alice in Wonderland* upon eating the magic mushroom, or drinking the bottled liquid.

B.

*The Ubermarionette*

*(A performance devised and directed by Aura Satz, with the performers Sam-Birt & Marie-Louise Flexen)*

*Post-script*

1.

A constellation of several questions, riddles, conundrums. Positions of control, subjection, projection, absorption. Translation, how to get from one state to another. From experience to a literary regulation of experience that is theorised, canonised; from these descriptions, often tending towards abstraction, an attempt to extract the possibility of a practise; next a phase of embodiment, of theory that moves towards incarnation, fleshing out; and now, materialization complete, the new challenge of finding a meta-language to give form to experience, and a space in which to contain the explosion of refraction. The process which for so long sought to draw out from the page is finally staggered into the reverse, an attempt to bring back to the page the expansion of bodily movement, uncontrollable...

I present here the basic movements.

The research begins as spectator, believer or disbeliever. It begins sitting somewhere as an audience, looking at these objects coming to life, awakened to conversion. My rhetoric loses itself with its source material, I camouflage my voice, the voices that I speak of become my own, theirs becomes mine. My ethical discomfort in speaking of faith resolves itself through empathy: 'I believe with you, not outside of you.' I refuse to deny, refuse to partake, refuse to take a dogmatic stance when speaking of dogma. When writing of sermons I too sermonise, somehow this soothes my guilt. The subject matter is uncomfortable. This is why I choose it. I want language to force its way out in the only way it can. Academic analysis terrifies me in that I panic I am neutralising or silencing. The only option is slipping in and out of empathy, losing my voice within the narrative. So. I am spectator. I watch historical moments of belief in the inanimate resurrected. I am 'converted' through sight, like my historical examples. It is hard to recuperate experience, and the descriptions at my disposition oscillate between justifications and accusations, those who believe and those who disbelieve. They write of qualities of perception, senses that awaken to the miraculous or minds that lack in abstraction. It is hard for me to grasp the object I am looking at. This creates discomfort and unease. I refer to experiences of images but have only words. Exegesis feels unstable, elusive.

Slowly I move away from faith to spectacle. A form of watching that is less problematic. Watching no longer moves between the extremes of true or false, belief or disbelief. Instead, suspension of disbelief. Knowledge teased into belief. The strange delight in deciphering the 'How is it done?' whilst leaving the riddle undeciphered, knowing there exists an answer. Up until now the quest for knowledge was in the vicinity of the disbeliever. Cynical, he would explain how the idolater was deceived, expose the mechanism, show the material crudeness of the object of faith. But here knowledge occupies a very different place. Disbelief is willingly suspended, and one can watch, partake, eventually create or become the object of suspension of belief. I start to breathe again, I see a way out, no longer panic but start to speculate with the possibilities now laid out in front of me. I can become; not only spectator, but the very thing that is seen to come to life. The tone is of showing, showing in order to hide, hiding in order to show. The suspension of disbelief is enacted through gesture, knowledge and a sense of wonderment are titillated, delighted by the hands that open and close compartments containing mechanisms. Through a keen spectator, I watch the small twists of knobs and handles, trying to see the operator through the puppet. I enjoy the irresolution, want to remain on this brink of belief. I can imagine how it's done, but a sense of mystery remains, and nothing detracts, nothing neutralises. This is theatre. Now I can move from the belief to the actions that take place. The descriptions available to me become more refined, more articulate. Not only does the image, the sculpture, *move* (turn its head, bleed sweat, cry, travel from one place to another, descend from the cross); the nuances of this movement suddenly reveal themselves. It is as though the sculpture releases its joints to become puppet, it acquires *articulation*, and with articulation, I find voice, and with voice, I find body. From the moment a movement quality, a rhythm can be traced, assimilation can take place. Each text can now be read as prescriptions for action, they project forward rather than retrospectively. And because they try to describe that which defies description, slips through the black ink off the page into some strange realm of evocation, the sense of potential enactment is imminent, urgent, inescapable. The texts begin to plea for incarnation, they dictate the rhetoric of physicality. No longer can I talk without describing what I have seen, I become the various witnesses I described earlier. The starting place is with the audience, but of a very different kind. This spectatorship is the kind of reverie that is enabled by performance, a watching without conversion, although floating together with the spectacle in another time and space. This state of trance is a passive form of assimilation which contains within it the possibility of *imitation*. *I can become what I have seen*. While watching certain movement qualities, I can visualise different animating forces that move these bodies. The discourse of life/death loses its simplicity, the stage becomes a pedestal gushing with animating agency. What before was god or idol is now translated into the pull and push of gravity. The animate and the inanimate merge, lose themselves whilst retaining distinct resistances to the vertical pulls and pushes.

Horizontality is non-resistance, equated with death and limpness. Verticality is resurrection, the possibility of animation. The terminology shifts into *kinetics*. My body can now imitate, not only watch or speak of/for. Incarnation, performing bodies, theatricality, this is the only way out. An additional step is taken: the division between spectator and spectacle begins to dissolve, as does the gulf between animate and inanimate, soft and hard. Not only is there a move towards emulation of the inanimate (for how could we always watch from our constitution of live flesh? It was unbearable to always be in this position of power over and fascination by, a sense of superiority – in size, mobility, will, and therefore intelligence – as well as adoration and yearning), there is a *becoming inanimate, without dying*. Becoming image. How to achieve this offering which is at once structurally external, subject to the gaze, in other words a becoming spectacle (and there is something paralysing in this) as well as internal, the experience of foreignness and insentientcy? The fragmentation (always looming, literally or in the form of material vulnerability) that characterised the early subjects of the gaze of belief – be they icons smashed to pieces by iconoclasts, or relics of the dead fragmented and dispersed between various holy sites – now becomes intrinsic to the body on display. The prosthetic body is the most obvious model for a kind of bodily grace which is at once animate and inanimate, fragmented and whole. The icon was a participation in animation, an indexical emanation of liveness; similarly the relic was a remnant of animation which still functioned as if alive although dead. The movement into theatre followed briefly after the appearance of incorrupt cadavers, bodies that retained wholeness whilst losing the flexibility and articulation of live flesh. To some degree this is where theatre intervenes, as the resurrection of a corpse, a form of embodiment and incarnation that offers itself to the spectator whilst being distinctly different from everyday life. It exists as visual proof to be looked at, tangibly groped as corporeal body. In being looked at, it is between medusa-like immobilisation and a constant effort toward re-animation, resuscitation. Every act on stage is one of re-enactment, bringing back to life what is essentially dead. This effect shows itself most purely in dance, in choreographies that render visible the dynamics of control and lack of it. The puppet does not act, it *moves*, and in its movements it reveals the forces activating it. The puppet emulates life whilst transparently confessing death. It simulates verticality when its true tendency is horizontality. It appears most alive when emulating death. Without the strings, the hand above it or indeed within it holding it upright, the puppet falls limply to the ground. There is little psychology involved, it is a question of kinetics. *The preconditions of kinetics are articulation, fragmentation, segmentation. The puppet is always already 'broken'.* The operator, live flesh, manipulates inanimate matter and conveys movement to it, through translation, movement that moves from one body to the next and is transformed by the journey. This effect is even more intricate when rather than being split apart it coexists in the one and same body, the body that both carries and is carried by a prosthetic limb. Lack of agency is only partly the issue. It is always implicit, but never fulfilled. These marriages of animate and

inanimate can never fully emancipate themselves, yet nor are they ever fully enslaved. *Equation, not substitution.* The rhetoric, the meta-language, becomes one of embodiment. I can say 'I', for this is the crucial turning point of the research.

2.

And so I set up the conditions for enactment. At first upon myself. I inflict everything I will inflict on others on myself first. I must know from experience. A strange configuration of mimicry begins, one in which mirrors and casts will feature at length, because the essence of this performance is mimicry and reflection. I begin to discover the role of director as one of 'place'. I am the place in which these events and objects gather, but my resistance to authoritarian models, although I will remain throughout initiator, instigator, flame, makes me the meeting point, not the dictator. I find the problem of translation fascinating in its difficulty. The process becomes one of 'Creation', of sculptural genesis that enables animation. I make casts of my limbs, in the process of which my limbs become foreign to me, immobilised image. I know I am there somewhere inside, but my body is numbed and stilled. Part of me is puppet to the other part. I try and shift my trapped arm with my free arm, move my fossilised leg with my two arms and remaining leg. The stumbling is beautiful. This is the movement quality I am after. It has to do with fragmentation and re-integration. I am not incapacitated or crippled: I am exploring control and subjection, projection and absorption, on *me*, without losing, without falling, without dying. The problem lies with externality and distinction, two bodies, a stable dynamics of control and subjection. Self-infliction, the internal divide of puppet and puppeteer, puts my ethical unease at rest. The body must learn to move itself as though it did not belong to itself, although it is still whole and unharmed. From the casts I make doubles, moulds of the 'original,' to be worn as adornments, pendulums from above, crutches from below, both empowering and debilitating. They are at once excessive surplus, as well as (by implication) indispensable supplements. They reflect and echo, but are also autonomous self-standing entities. The 'original' body must translate movement to 'itself', the same shape but of another consistency. The real arm swings the prosthetic arm, doubled, but each react differently to gravity, each have a different rhythm. The difference is more prominent during the first stage, when the limbs I give the performers are mine. They must dance with bits of me, I project onto them, they project onto my projections. Translation and mimicry become difficulties and techniques to be assimilated. How do I as choreographer transmit movement qualities to them. I use visualisation, words, experiences. I myself enact the gestures I am looking for. I swing the prosthetic limbs and ask them to imitate the quality of movement of limplimbedness, to try and become the image, split their bodies. When words and example are not enough, I physically intervene by touch, I move them, relocate an arm, a leg, a head, manipulate their bodies as though they were puppets. These moments feel tense. I am hyper aware of the invasion, of the touching. They move as requested. We try to avoid

images of mutilation, disempowerment, debilitation. I try to avoid this in my method of translation. Although they are 'hired bodies', so to speak, I do not want them to lose themselves. I speak of one animating force flickering throughout the stage, animating different parts of them at different moments, segmenting their bodies through life rather than through death. Together they form a whole body, a new body, sometimes proportionate, sometimes lacking, sometimes excessive. We work with my limbs first, familiarising them with the weight, the shape, the rhythm. I want them to leave the theatre with the memory of having carried an extra weight all day, of having manipulated and been manipulated by my limbs. I want them to be able to emulate the same movements, but without the limbs. In a strange reversal, I appoint them to animate my body, the dead body of the director. I want to choreograph their bodies, but ask them to choreograph mine through projection. At a certain point the lack of symmetry stands out, they need their own limbs, cast from their own bodies. In order to understand the shapes and rhythms I want, the dancers themselves need to be stilled into image, cast, moulded, given new limbs of their own that mirror them to perfection, creating a startling sense of recognition and foreign-ness. We leave this to the last moment, enabling a genuine disorientation on the stage. Throughout I sense that I have de-familiarised them with their own bodies through reflection and replication, they often find it hard to know which limb to move, they are spatially disoriented, confused. Their bodies are truly shape-shifting, the illusion is expansive; although within the illusion, they too 'fall' for it, lose their contours and shapes, become spectators of the illusion. We work at first with hard matter, consistency. Then we shift to work with mirror images, reflection. The movement quality differs, but essentially the exploration is of the same metamorphosis, a negotiation of the differing consistencies and configurations of real and the double, the fragmented, the whole and the multiplied.

Why did I choose women to perform, why was this so important? In the writing the question of gender was always somehow diverted, unvoiced. I was masked by the text. The only writing which could delve into questions around femininity was precisely a self-referential note about voice, ventriloquism, voice displacement. But with embodiment, my female body becomes inevitable. Conjuring comes in as the iconography which enables a discourse around animation and de-animation using the female body as the very instrument of magic and illusion. It is the vocabulary where all my concerns can express themselves in the form of entertainment without death, where the darker sides of my research can lighten into sheer performativity, where I can transmit a sense of wonderment in the spectator, the same wonderment that I have held onto so dearly throughout my entire research process. Conjuring is the subsequent development of resurrection, possession, trance, fragmentation, reintegration, puppetry, hypnosis, look, no strings, nothing in the box, nothing up my sleeve, nothing hurts, nothing bleeds, strange things shape-shift and reconfigure, become alive, die, levitate,



disappear, reappear, move, bend, dissolve, know, show, are... and it is all within the canons of this performance, it is all allowed and expected.

3.

The performance:

It starts and they are in the box, closed, dark. The box is crucial, it is a stage, a container, a relic box, a tomb from which resurrected movement can emerge, a body of skin, an illusion chamber, the place in which metamorphosis can take place. Musical boxes play on the floor simultaneously, creating evocative sounds of mechanised animation. Light shines through the cracks, giving a sense of undefined presence. I try to conceive of a genesis of movement, from de-animation and horizontality towards uprightness and mobility. The music ends and suddenly the middle section of the magic box flaps open and two waists are visible. The middle section of the body, the torso, is the most elementary. From it the rest can spread open, up and outward. The mirror reflections make this body amorphous, shapeless. An arm slowly slides up and over from behind, falling limply, and with it the other arm. From behind another arm slowly slumps over and out, and a leg, almost disembodied, starts edging its way until it too flops forward. Movement is painfully slow, unclear whether they are animate or inanimate, one, two, more, real, prosthetic. The slow rhythm makes these bodies indeterminate. Moment of silence, sustaining the stillness, and the arms start groping about desperately to close the box. As if this instance of limplimbedness were indecent, shameful, desperate to return to the linear angularity of the box. The in-between moments are awkward, the bodies prepare for their next position, still shapeless. The top end of the box opens and two heads inch out one on top of the other, parallel, eyes closed. They breathe each other's breath, neither is the animator or the animated, they are one and the same body that has one lung each between them. Inhale, exhale, inhale, exhale. Their eyelids are painted with open eyes, they lie suspended between states of animation and awakeness. Their eyes slowly open and look out, not to anything in particular, but open. It is important that they can speak. They can speak for they are not silent dumb dolls, objects merely to be seen. They know. They speak on top of each other, literally. They echo each other's voice so that the words become indistinct, rhythm as opposed to psychological meaning. The more significant words will surface and echo throughout the rest of the performance. Silence, they have worn their voices out. The lung was enough for very little speech. Next time, more. The heads go back in the box and again the middle section flaps open, but this time they appear to have disappeared. All one sees is an empty mirror chamber, and a ghostly, angelic, otherworldly choir of voices transforming the box into a musical instrument. From the corner, one can see crouched bodies revealing the illusion, but this does not neutralise the magical effect. The final high pitched sound dies out and out of the box slump two heads in the same position, arms framing their faces. From the middle section disembodied legs appear symmetrically, as

though mirroring each other, and slowly rise, as though suspended, levitating. Their feet touch and, as though afraid of each other, of reflection-cum-body, they shrink back, prepare to emerge toward autonomy. The bodies unwind, unroll from the box, backwards. The final position is on the floor, showing the box, like a horizontal conjuror's assistant. From here the two separate, and again, as when breathing and speaking, become one single body that has been detached, divided. The one can only move from the impulse of the legs, the other using the arms. Together they gradually move towards the back of the box, grunting and heaving as they figure out how to use this strange body that must relearn movement from elsewhere. From behind the box one dancer's body slowly arises, levitating upwards towards verticality. They will soon stand, but for now one of them floats. The eyes are closed, entranced, but there is no one there to entrance her, no puppeteer. The body descends, and two heads appear facing away from each other, rising upwards parallel. They stand, they are vertical, but autonomous verticality can only take place through repulsion, and they push off from each other with a twist of the head. They turn to face each other and this time repulsion has become attraction, one mesmerises the other, revealing the swaying instability of uprightness. Snap of the fingers, and they are out of it, fully confident in a stylisation of the Conjuror and the Conjuror's Assistant, alternating between 'doing' and 'showing', engaging intensely with the audience ('I know, I have the knowledge') and smiling blankly, pointing at the magic trick ('look, he knows, watch carefully, there's nothing in the box'). They are at once the magic trick, the operator and the facilitator, the one who *shows* and the one who *knows*. They step in and out of the spotlight, the one who shows is illuminated (for strangely the exhibitor is often the most invisible, and precisely for this reason dresses up in over-visibility) and the one who knows denies us knowledge and is therefore in the shadows. Their roles never crystallise into one or the other, they swiftly throw the ball, transfer knowledge constantly. Then they solemnly lift the chain of music boxes, wrapping it around their wrists as though a bracelet, manacles, a strange Houdini escape act, and are pulled upwards by it, the force from above being stronger than the force from below. Slowly they place the chain on the box, diagonally, one up, the other down. All the boxes are placed, and in a rotating motion one swivels as the other disappears behind the box. Disembodied hands emerge, and begin to wind up the mechanisms, one by one. As they are placed on the box the sound is amplified in preparation of a kind of animation that is about to take place, like ballerina jewellery boxes. The wrist, the animating force, pirouettes in place as though a ballerina doll, echoing the winding motion it inflicts on the musical movements. As the keys are wound up the remaining dancer starts to twirl on the floor with her extra leg in a series of rotary movements, she has assimilated the third leg. Throughout we speak of the 'relationship' and intention behind each move. The triped is constantly 'in' and 'with' her leg, caressing it, absorbing it, accompanying it. Her legs are like a dress, draped on the floor, swayed gently from side to side. The music lends it the tone of a freak-show, but she is enamoured of her leg, not made a spectacle of. She is within it,

not without. The other dancer in the meantime surfaces in a ballerina-like pirouette, eyes glazed like a doll, picks up the chain of mechanical movements and descends with it behind the box. The threelegged dancer slides through the box, pausing at the moment her torso is framed and detached from the rest, like the 'sawing a woman in two' trick. At this moment the prosthetic arms are thrown forward from behind the box, violently recalling the torso's segmentation. They thud heavily. We oscillate constantly between moments of togetherness and moments of alienation from these extra limbs, they are never consolidated. They shift from being 'part of' to being worn, to being foreign, almost hard to shake off and repudiate. A head gradually emerges, resting on an arm, nudging it, discovering it as different to herself. She stands and the arms sway at the slightest movement. She looks behind her, as if to see the animating force which must be external, puppeteered. She accepts them, 'wears' the arms like gloves, parallel to the real arms, and does a greta garbo majestic turn displaying them in the spotlight. She is proud of her multiplication, these dead arms which are draped over her shoulders like a fur stole. But then the arms seem to pull her away, against her will, relocating her elsewhere. She throws them up, catching them before they fall in a curious rhythmic sequence of control and lack of it which evidences their materiality. The leg dancer stands, allows the smallest movement of her leg before tossing it in the air and grabbing it by the ankle as if a corpse. A darker side to limbs becomes apparent, their heavy cadaverous materiality. The moments of dropping, letting go, revealing the limbs as 'thing', break the spell of puppetry and are equally as important as the moments of object-manipulation, animation, picking up and giving life to. To break away from the dark humiliation of holding the leg was the wrong way up, she then turns it back towards the floor, intertwining with it lovingly, moving as though dancing with a partner. She waltzes, until for an instant the leg creates an imbalance, she tries to stand but the asymmetry of the leg pulls sideways. She stands whilst falling. In the meantime, the arms become an embrace and dictate a circular motion which leads to sweeping movement on the floor, offering the four arms to the audience. As this is happening an acceleration takes place, the leg kicks in the air, reveals a sweeping upwardly energy previously unseen. Throughout we discover with fascination (and some frustration) that the rhythms of the limbs and of the real arms differ in pace, and that in order to sustain an illusion of integrity, they must mimic the inanimate, rather than the other way round. This gives the performance the pace of inanimate matter falling, swinging, swaying, collapsing. The falling must be cautious, otherwise it risks vulgarity, blunt inert matter. For this reason, most of the movements are quite slow, evocative, there is too much to take in and the gaze needs to linger. The slower the movements the more indistinct the divide between animate and inanimate. We want to accelerate, shift the tempo, but it is difficult and precarious. The dancers, up until now distinct from one another, in their own worlds with their own counterparts, suddenly see each other, as though acknowledging the possibility of a union. The arms move towards the centre of the spotlight, the leg tiptoes in a minor limp that is more an awkward stylisation of

dance than pain. Both in the light, they create one single glamorous symmetrical body with three legs (bent down) and four arms (lifted up). The false arms drop as the real ones stay up. The pose is sustained for a moment. Then they morph into a new body as the one rests on the other's back, and an indistinct mass of arms and legs gesticulate together. They continue until gradually slumped onto the floor, a pile of limbs which then picks itself up, apart, unclear whose is what, what is whose. Here the limplimbedness expands into the actual body, suddenly foreign to itself. Panic sets in. The limbs are thrown off, away. They recover, find themselves 'back' again. Once more they can show (rather than be) the 'body of magic', the instrument of illusion, they are Conjuror's Assistants. The box is opened up, slowly, blinding the audience with their own reflection and the refracted light. The lids of the box create a small wall behind which to hide. They lie on the mirrors, the upper half of the body eclipsed by the back, the only visible thing being the legs which kick down the front part of the box. The legs rest on their side and are multiplied by the mirrors, then the top leg rises sideways toward the upright mirror, the other follows, they bend and move to create a sexualised image of copulation, several bodies on top of one another. They halve to create phantom bodies of their own fragmentation, and their reflection creates an image of multiplication that is almost obscene. The movements are almost ballet exercises, up, down, flex, bend. Ballerina's in bigger jewellery boxes. Then out into the position of sitting upright, half of the body behind the box, headless. The arm emerges and ballet movements of alternating arms and legs. The arms then drape across the mirror upwards until their real counterpart appears, reflection becomes real limb, showing the assistant-like gesture of 'no head'. They point at their own phantasmagoric nature. The hands come down, tap the middle mirror which falls to reveal a missing leg, the reflection which is suddenly aborted, severed. The real leg slowly resurfaces as though re-growing, reappearing as real counterpart. The dancers release themselves from this state of halving, twist to look at their mirror images (first to the audience, then at themselves and their reflected faces), until a small tap of the mirror downwards makes this reflection disappear. The box is totally open and flat, it becomes a stage. They move gracefully towards the centre and breathe heavily on their reflection, pouncing backwards out of the light to leave only a pool of mist which slowly evaporates. They have disappeared, leaving behind only a trace of breath. They are pure ephemera. We feel anxious, the box does not want to be open, so the instant of display must be precise, short-lived. The box wants to close up on itself again, swallow them back in. The dancers roll themselves into it, holding on to the mirrors as their heads are multiplied, they are all-seeing, they can scan the entire space through the mirror chamber reflection. The box reshapes itself and the dancers enclose themselves back into it, wrap it around their bodies. I had wanted to free them, emancipate them from the box, but it dictated that they return, and they too felt a sense of belonging, they wanted to return into it. All is as before. I am outside the box, they inside it.

C.

## Chapter 5: *Puppet and Prosthesis*

15/09/2001: I write of the precariousness of mobility and suddenly in an accident I am thrown onto the pavement, twisted into the danger of loss, full of fright, overwhelmed by re-asserted body, reconfirmed wholeness. It is, it fell but still it is, it gets up, it runs, terrified, to the nearest wall, a vertical solidity to rid me of this forced horizontality, brief as it was. My body fell into some strange configuration I have no recollection of. I do not know what I used as pivot, how I landed, all I know is I was suddenly thrown down, gravity pulling with all its might and my strength of uprightness broken. I'm not sure how I fell, whether as a hard body of bone or a cushioned body of flesh... perhaps I used the harder bits of me, angular, like a puppet. Did I lose my shape, did I fall collapsed or tensed or both? When falling I saw standing a thing of the past, and guilty, I reflected in those split seconds on my yearning for a new aesthetic, a body that uses itself differently, foreign to itself, divided, and wondered whether this was a lesson, a cautionary sign to remind me of the need for compassion for the body that hurts, not only simulates.

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## ***Performances, Videos and Films***

- A Little Requiem for Kantor*. By Ariel Theatre, performed at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, June 2000.
- Ai Mon Amour: Carlotta Ikeda et son Butoh*. Directed by Kamal Musale. Videocassette. 1994.
- Berthrand's Toys*. By BlackSkyWhite's, performed at the Purcell Room, London, January 2001.
- Blue Beard*. Directed by Henk Schut, performed at the Little Angel Theatre, London, February 1999.



- Bunraku.* Directed by Faubion Bowers. Videocassette. 1973.
- Butoh: The Body on the Edge of Crisis.* Directed by Michael Blackwood. Videocassette. 1990.
- Coppelia.* Choreographed and directed by Peter Wright. Royal Opera House Videocassette. 1995.
- Dancing, vol. 7: The individual and the tradition.* Directed by Geoff Dunlop, Videocassette. 1993.
- Das Triadische Ballett: Ein Film in Drei Teilen.* Directed by Edith Demharter, Ralph Smolik, Hannes Winkler. Videocassette. 1970.
- Genesi.* By Societas Raffaello Sanzio. Sadler's Wells, London, July 2001.
- Gesture dance.* Directed by Rupert Wainwright. Videocassette. 1986.
- Isadora.* Directed by Ken Russell. Videocassette. 1966.
- Hibiki.* By Sankai Juku. Sadler's Wells, London, March 2001.
- Kantor.* Directed by A. Sapija. Videocassette. 1985.
- Le Théâtre de Tadeusz Kantor.* directed by Denis Bablet. Videocassette. 1985.
- Man and Mask: Oskar Schlemmer and the Bauhaus Stage.* (including metal dance, form dance, gesture dance, stick dance, hoop dance, playkit game and mask dance)  
Directed by Anthony Roland. Videocassette. 1970.
- Nemesis.* By Random Dance Company, performed at Sadlers Wells, London, March 2002.
- Sabotage Baby.* By Batsheva, performed at the Barbican Centre, London, October 2001.
- Still Distinguished.* By La Ribot, performed at South London Gallery, London, January 2001.
- The Swing at Night.* By Howard Baker, performed at the Puppet Barge Theatre, London, May 2001.
- Tadashi Endo.* Video Cassette compilation.
- Tadeusz Kantor's Mannequins.* Directed by A. Sapija. Videocassette. 1992
- The Tales of Hoffmann.* Directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, music by Jacques Offenbach. Videocassette. 1951.
- VB series.* Videocassette compilation.
- VB47.* By Vanessa Beecroft, performed at the Peggy Guggenheim collection in Venice, Italy, June 2001. Video and photographic documentation shown as part of the *Form Follows Fiction* exhibition, Castello Di Rivoli Museum in Turin, Italy, November 2001.
- Waiting.* By Carlotta Ikeda, Ariadone dance company, performed at the Place, London, October 1998.
- Wielopole, Wielopole.* By Tadeusz Kantor. Directed by A. Sapija. Videocassette. 1984.